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HINDOO KHAN

THE STORY OF HOW AN ENGLISH SOLDIER
MADE GOOD IN THE FACE OF
AN UPHILL FIGHT

BY

MAX JOSEPH PEMBERTON

SECOND EDITION

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HINDOO KHAN

PROLOGUE

THE HOLY MAN LOOKS INTO THE FUTURE

"FORTUNE awaits you, my brother. I see it written in the book of life. Thou shalt attain prosperity and greatness. For thou hast brains above the ordinary."

The speaker sat at the opening of a tent pitched beneath the dark green foliage of a mighty deodar. In the dim light of the rough shelter behind him could be seen an altar decked with wild flowers and wooden carvings. They were set to the honour of Allah, to whom his life and works were dedicated, for he was an ascetic, a holy man. The place he had chosen for his hermitage was on the summit of a small hill out of the beaten track. From the opening in his tent he looked down into the valley planted with bamboo and tea. The bamboo hedges with their slender stems, with plumes of pale leaf, and the tea with its neat rows of bushes, with lustrous dark green leaves, were a sight refreshing and cool to the eye. Beyond the valley was another hill rising gradually till it met the skyline. Here and there upon its surface where the vegetation had been cut could be seen a railroad track, its metals flashing like diamonds in the light of the morning sun. It was the two-foot gauge of the Darjiling Himalaya railway, which carried the sun-scorched peoples of the plains into the coolness

and grandeur of the mountains. Such was the holy man's outlook, but he was not concerned with it now, for he sat grinding a mixture of herbs in a rough stone basin while he gazed dreamily at a native who sat a few yards away upon a mossy bank.

The native—a Mohammadan—was young and massive, above the ordinary in size for his race. He sat and looked at the holy man with eyes of awe and reverence.

"But I do not understand, holy one," said he presently. "I am but a servant." And his eyes strayed to where, about a hundred paces away, a small English boy, with great whoops of delight, was trying without success to get a heavy kite to rise from the ground.

"The day will come when thou shalt no longer be a servant," said the holy man. "The sahibs are great, and it is great to serve the sahibs. But there are better things in store for you. One day thou shalt rise to be the counsellor of a ruler of men. Great prosperity will come to the State during your ministry. Yours will be a just rule tempered with kindness."

The holy man stopped speaking, and, taking a gourd, poured some water upon the herbs that he had ground to dust. The native watched him, his dark eyes filled with the light of excitement that could scarce be contained. He waited reverently for the ascetic to speak, and at the end of a minute or two, when the other still silently churned the mixture in the basin:

"Thou hast spoken, O holy one," said he in a low voice. "Thy words are the words of Allah,

and they cannot lie. Thy servant who is but dust for thy feet to trample on would hear more. Do my counsellings prosper to the end ? "

" Before many years have passed trouble will fall upon you and your people," said the holy man, pouring the mixture from the basin into a lota that stood upon the ground by his side. " But a saviour will come to you in the form of a sahib."

" A sahib, holy one ? "

" Yes, brother, I have spoken. Look to the *bawa* sahib yonder."

The Mohammadan glanced in the direction which the old man pointed out with a trembling, fleshless hand more like a skeleton's than a human being's, and saw the boy. He was sitting upon a head of felled timber with his kite upon his knee, and he was tying a large piece of coloured paper to the base of his toy with eager little fingers.

" See how happy and innocent he is, brother," said the holy man. " Would that Allah kept us always thus. It would be a world worth living in then, my brother. To-day his mind is filled with thoughts of toys and sweetmeats, but one day it will be filled with thoughts of war and killing. It is Allah's will, and he must see good in it. Allah is just. Otherwise he would not allow such things to be."

A long, clear whistle came up to them from the valley, and they both gazed down to where a little toy train crawled like a snake among the foliage, upwards and ever upwards on its journey to the lands of eternal snow. The boy had heard the whistle too, and for a moment his kite was forgotten and he stood watching the little engine as it puffed

and snorted up the gradient. Presently, excitement mastering him, he whipped off his hat and, running through the trees to find a better vantage spot, was soon lost to sight. The holy man dreamily gazed after him and seemed to have given himself up to reverie. But the other, his curiosity aroused to the top-most pitch, broke irreverently into it.

"But I do not understand, holy one. What is the *bawa* sahib to me?"

"That boy will play a great part in your life," said the ascetic one, coming back to earth with a jump. "Allah has decreed it, and Allah's word is law. I spoke just now of a trouble that should fall upon you and your people. And I spoke of a saviour. That boy will be your saviour. When the time comes you must take him into your service. Without him ruin will come to your country; your people will be scattered and your villages burnt to the ground. He will save you from that, and prosperity will come to the land of those for whom you minister. I have spoken."

"And afterwards?" asked the native.

"There is darkness. I can read no more."

The boy came running back to them, out of breath and flushed.

"Take me home, Hindoo," said he pleadingly. "I am, oh, so tired."

The Mohammadan laid a gentle hand upon the curly head.

"My son," said he tenderly, "your Hindoo shall take you home."

"Pick-a-back like always," cried the boy.

"Jump up, *bawa* sahib."

And so, perched on the massive back of the

Mohammadan, in one hand tightly clutching the dearly beloved kite, and the other gripping fast the massive shoulder in front of him, the boy rode his pick-a-back down the hill to where a red-roofed bungalow showed amongst the trees.

CHAPTER ONE

MY LADY DANCES

THE large ballroom with its festoons of sweet-smelling flowers was filled with a merry, fashionable crowd. Lights from innumerable candelabra shone down upon a moving sea of dainty dresses, mostly creations from the best houses in Paris. A band—a Hungarian band, dressed in its picturesque costume—played a light, invigorating composition from one of the latest musical comedies, and the world and his wife danced to the spirit of it with vigour and enthusiasm.

At one end of the room, beneath the fronds of a large palm, stood an old man, upright and square of shoulder. You would have proclaimed him a soldier and been right. It was General West, C.B., and his reputation for soldiering had been made on the north-west frontier of India. To-night he was not dancing; he left that to the young; he was here to see that everything went happily, that everyone had a partner, and that the dance was a success. The fashionable world had come to his house in Park Lane to dance in honour of his little girl's coming of age, and he meant to send the fashionable world away happy and content. Now and again amongst the moving crowd he caught sight of a pretty girl with auburn hair, and when he saw that she was happy and enjoying herself a smile came upon a face that seldom smiled. In the Army he had a reputation for being hard. His men called him General Gloom, and said that he must have been

jilted in his youth. It was the common moan of messes to which he had been invited how that his presence caused a chill to fall upon the company so that even the most witty and facetious withdrew into their shells and ate their dinners in silence. There are a few men in the world who lack a sense of humour and take life so seriously that there is no time for laughter, and among such was numbered the General. Anyway, to-night he smiled, and I said that it was caused by the sight of his little girl enjoying herself, but perhaps it was her partner that had some cause for the breaking down of this permanent seriousness. For was she not dancing with the hon. Bertie Charters, and was not he the son of a peer of the realm? The General was ambitious for his daughter. Among one of his greatest desires was to see her married well. If her mother had been alive he would have left it to her and been content. But it was his business now that his helpmate had been taken from him, and he determined that, like all things that he tackled, it should be done well. The hon. Bertie Charters had for a long time been in his mind as a happy union for his little girl, and it was to this end that he was working. And so when the General saw that the couple were getting on so well together he actually smiled, and if one of his brother officers had been there to see it would have been something worth relating.

Presently the band ceased playing, and the dancers left the ballroom, some making for those nice quiet little nooks that had been spotted before the dance—just the places for a lonely *tête-à-tête*; others for the refreshment-room, for dancing is thirsty work; and others for the gardens and a

breath of fresh air before the next dance. The General was left alone, but only for a moment. An elderly lady, fashionably dressed, her neck a blaze of diamonds, entered the ballroom and pounced down upon the solitary figure left standing beneath the palms.

"I've been looking for you everywhere, General," said she. "You're wanted badly to make up a fourth. I absolutely refuse to play cut-throat. Come along at once or you will spoil my evening."

"I am afraid I do not feel like bridge to-night, Lady Fawcett," said the General.

"Now that's most provoking. Of course it proves conclusively that you ran away on purpose," tapping his shoulder with her fan. "But you needn't worry. Everything is going splendidly. Look for news before many days have gone."

"You have heard something to make you form that opinion?" asked the General anxiously.

"Yes. My daughter Molly has sounded Dorothy and found that she is very partial to the hon. Bertie."

"And he?"

"Head over ears in love with her. Why, man! you have only to watch him to-night."

"He seems to be enjoying himself," said the General.

"Enjoying himself? Why, he's in heaven. Not because of your silly old ball, but because he's with Dorothy. And now, what about that rubber? The young people can look after themselves."

And the General fell as Adam fell, and allowed himself to be led away. For man is but a piece of tinsel in the hands of women.

. . . . . .

Outside the ballroom in a long gallery that looked down upon the outer hall the hon. Bertie Charters, clothed in an immaculately cut dress suit, leant against the stained oak balustrade and chatted with Dorothy West, who was sitting in a cosy chair before him. The hon. Bertie, if he had been a woman, would have been called *petite*. He was small but well proportioned. To some he might appear good-looking. His features were well formed, but he was very bald about the temples.

"The old house looks like a fairyland to-night," he was saying, "and the princess of the festivities adorable."

"And the hon. Bertie Charters is talking the most awful nonsense," said the girl.

The eyes she turned smiling upon him were very large and very blue. Her features were pretty, but her colouring beautiful—complexion as rosy and fresh as a little child's crowned by an aureole of rich auburn hair.

"I mean it, Dorothy," said the hon. Bertie. "But let's go out into the grounds, away from all this. I will talk sense to you there."

There was meaning in his words, and it brought a troubled look to the eyes of his partner, but he did not see it, for she hid her face with a fan. It lasted only for a moment, and the next she was smiling as before.

"They will be dancing in another minute," she said, "and I absolutely refuse to miss a single dance to-night. A twenty-first birthday comes only once in a lifetime, you know."

"And from to-night you are your own mistress,

and I suppose you must have your way," said her partner with a sigh.

" Yes, the Princess's wish is law to-night. Why, there is Captain Williams looking for me, and he is my next partner."

She rose to her feet, and the band struck up the prelude to a set of lancers.

" I'm running down to Ranelagh to-morrow. A first-rate polo match. The General said you might like to come."

For a moment Dorothy hesitated, and then, seeing his disappointment :

" Yes—I shall be delighted."

" Good. Then I will call for you and the General to-morrow at three."

" And I will break a woman's prerogative and actually not keep you waiting," said she with a smile.

The next moment she was led away upon the arm of her military partner.

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNWELCOME GUEST

THE hon. Bertie Charters watched his late partner out of sight, and turning, wandered down the Elizabethan stairway. In the spacious square hall into which it led him he spied a comfortable-looking chesterfield drawn up before a log fire, and he sank into its soft cushions with a sigh of relief. Dancing was an exertion to him, any sort of exercise was his aversion, and he only danced with Dorothy West because he thought it pleased her and he was particularly anxious to please her. The hon. Bertie had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He had been spoilt—absolutely spoilt—as a child. And there were some who said that it was a pity, as he had the making of good things in him. Everything that he wished for and was to be bought with money he could obtain, for his fortune ran into the hundreds of thousands. He had been everywhere worth going to, seen everything worth seeing, and sampled every amusement worth sampling, and at the age of thirty-five he found himself bored with life. Nothing pleased him, nothing amused him, nothing was worth doing. From this slough of despond he was rescued by meeting with Dorothy West. From that moment his *ennui* left him, and he became a changed person. Some said that she would be the making of him, others that if she refused him he would go to the devil. His lady friends—who were, of course, all very bitter at the way things were shaping—said

that he was throwing himself away, and that no good would come of it. Anyway, everyone agreed that a great change had come over the hon. Bertie, and that recently his society was most cheerful and agreeable, and very different from a few months back, when it had been gloomy, morose, and irritable.

The hon. Bertie drew a gold cigar case from his pocket, and, choosing a Romeo and Juliet from an assortment of the best makes, lit it carefully. This done, he leant back again upon the soft cushions of the chesterfield and gave himself up to thought. And his thoughts were of Dorothy and their expedition to Ranelagh. He meant to ask her to marry him, and he schemed how it could be done. Several times an opportunity had presented itself to him and he had failed to take it. At the psychological moment his courage had failed him. It was an extraordinary trait to find in a man of the world, but there it was, and the hon. Bertie was as shy as the proverbial mongoose. Now as he lay back on the cushions the fumes of the fragrant Havannah helped him to forget his present surroundings. He began to dream of the future. And in that dream he had got Dorothy apart from her father. He had led her into the rose garden at Ranelagh, and there in an arbour he had her alone, cut off from the rest of the world by a screen of green leaves and coloured blossoms. Words that he should speak to her presented themselves to him, jumbled and confused, to be dismissed as irreverent again and again. And then at last the opening sentences began to frame themselves, and he saw his way clear. Then it was that a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and, looking up with annoyance stamped clearly

upon his face, he found himself confronted by Sir Edward Banks, the lawyer.

"Hallo, Bertie," said he, sitting at the other end of the chesterfield. "Mooning again. I thought you had put that behind you. I wish you'd take my advice, my dear boy, and get something to do. Go in for one of the professions, or cultivate a hobby. An interest in life would be the making of you."

The hon. Bertie, wishing all sorts of condign punishments for the disturber of his thoughts, nevertheless proffered his cigar case.

"My dear Edward," said he, "you may be wrong. I may have found that interest."

"For a time, yes," said the lawyer. "Dorothy's a sweet little girl, and I wish you the best of luck. But I do not think marriage sufficient. I have known you for many years—since you were a boy at school—and I am afraid you will drift back. And then it will be bad both for her and you. It is because I am very fond of Dorothy that I am tackling you, and shall go on tackling you on that score until I have my way. You've got brains and courage, and you ought to use them. At present you're leading a waster's life. If I did not know you so well I should not dare to speak like that."

The hon. Bertie flinched under the bold attack of this little lawyer whose success at the Criminal Bar was excelled by none.

"My dear Edward," said he, "I have thought the same things myself. But how am I to begin? You don't ask me, surely, at the age of thirty-five, to rub up Latin again and bury myself in dull volumes on common law and jurisprudence? I couldn't do it, Edward. You're asking too much."

"Well, my dear boy," said the lawyer with a shrug of his shoulders, "if you don't find something you'll drift back. No man is happy unless he's got something to do. Hallo! Who's this?"

The hon. Bertie turned his head lazily in the direction of the doorway in answer to the lawyer's exclamation. A man had entered, and was handing his hat and coat to one of the flunkeys. He was tall, square of shoulder, and unmistakably a soldier. His face, with its clear-cut features, was bronzed almost black by exposure to the sun. Indeed, so dark was he that he might have been taken for an Indian in the shaded light of the hall. His manner seemed embarrassed, as though he feared to be seen, and he gave instructions to the flunkey in a low voice, looking about him uneasily.

For a moment the hon. Bertie gazed at the newcomer, and then sat up with a start.

"My God, Edward," he whispered, bending towards the lawyer, "it's that fellow Michael Hepburn!"

"Michael Hepburn?"

"Yes. Ssh!"

The newcomer passed them in the wake of the flunkey and went up the stairway. They watched him go, and then the hon. Bertie rose to his feet in perturbation, as though he would follow.

"Confound the fellow! What is he doing here?"

"My dear Bertie," said the lawyer, "who is this man, and why has his presence upset you so?"

"Surely you remember the case, Edward," said the hon. Bertie, still watching the stairway. "The fortress of Bilasparg and the cutting up of two English companies there. This fellow Hepburn was in command, and it was through disobedience

of orders that it happened. He was court-martialled and dismissed the Army. What in heaven's name brings him to this house to-night I cannot for the life of me think."

"Hepburn—Bilasparg," said the lawyer, ruminating. "By jove, yes! I remember reading the case now. He had orders to strike his camp and move on to Jillapur, and he failed to carry them out. Yes, I recollect. It seemed to me that they were a bit hard on the young fellow though. But then I am not an expert in military law. Anyway, I do not see why it should, shall we say, bar him from coming here to night."

"Why, the fellow's an outcast," said the hon. Bertie angrily. "He will be kicked out of every decent place he goes to. It is the worst offence that can happen to a soldier, and there is none that is looked down on so much by society. I was at school with him, and when I heard of his disgrace I told myself that he would have the good taste to go and bury himself in the wilds. The General must know of this. If he likes to let him stay that's his business, but I'm rather inclined to think that he will kick him out."

And the hon. Bertie, having made one of the longest speeches in his life, inspired by the newcomer's intrusion, moved briskly away in search of the General.

For a few seconds after he had gone the lawyer sat deep in thought, then, rising preparatory to joining the company, made his way to the stairway.

"The mark of the silver spoon," he mused as he mounted. "There are moments when I begin to have grave fears for my friend the hon. Bertie."

CHAPTER THREE

A LOVERS' MEETING

In a snuggery of a dimly lit conservatory sat Dorothy West. Before her, holding a letter in his hand, stood the newcomer who had caused the hon. Bertie's outbreak. He seemed ill at ease, and there was an expression of distress upon his handsome face.

"I came as you ordered me in this letter," said he. "I did not know that you were giving a dance. I should have preferred some quieter meeting."

"And what quieter place could you have than this fairyland of flowers and shrubs?" said Dorothy plucking a Gloire-de-Dijon from a jardinière close at hand.

"Oh, yes, this place is all right, but I had to run the gauntlet through all these people. It was a trying experience."

"The soldier has lost his courage," said Dorothy, looking at the speaker critically.

"Yes, that's a fact. I'm an outcast now and the sight of people's contemptuous glances is an anathema; it hurts."

"You are too sensitive, Michael."

"You do not understand, Dorothy," said he, wearily sinking on to the end of the settee upon which she sat. "I came here to-night to make a confession. You have heard something from the papers and from your father. You have heard how, in spite of orders from my commanding officer, I remained the night in the fortress of Bilasparg when I should have moved on the same night to Jillapur.

You have heard perhaps of the subsequent *débâcle*, where I lost half my men—God rest their brave souls! And then of the court-martial and my disgrace. You are waiting for some explanation that will clear me, but the thing that hurts me most is that I cannot give one. The facts as laid bare by the court-martial are true, every one of them. What prompted me to bivouac the night in face of orders I cannot for the life of me think. I have puzzled over it and can find no reason. The facts of that wretched night all seem blurred and indistinct in my mind. The only solution I have come to is that there must be a kink in my brain, and that for once in my life it failed to act. It is a sad ending to a career that I loved. But I have committed the unforgivable sin for a soldier, and there is no going back. I have to give up my career, and, what is worst of all, I have to give up you."

"Yes," said Dorothy, busily plucking the petals of the Gloire-de-Dijon. "I suppose that you will have to do that."

"I could not do otherwise. I came here to tell you that to-night."

"And what are you going to do—after to-night?"

"I have not thought."

"And you do not mean to see me any more?"

"This will be the last time. I am expecting any minute a polite message from your father to leave his house."

He rose to his feet.

"I'm afraid it's good-bye, Dorothy. That's as it should be. Don't think that I am heartless. I am thinking of your future. You are too precious to be wasted on a failure. I shall never forget you.

My once happy dreamings must remain as such to the end of the chapter."

He stood looking down at her with an expression of great misery.

"Very well then—if you have decided. Good-night."

"Good-night and God bless you," said he, and turned to go.

"Until our next meeting," said Dorothy, crumpling the petals of the rose in trembling fingers.

"Our next meeting?" said he, stopping and turning back. "What do you mean, Dorothy?"

"We shall meet in the courts."

"In the courts?"

"I shall sue you for breach of promise."

He came back slowly, as though half comprehending her words.

"I do not understand, Dorothy," said he.

"Sit down, Michael," said she. "I'm going to talk to you. Have you forgotten a jolly little place called Sonning-on-Thames, and a pretty red cottage with the most delightful gardens? Time, five years ago. Characters, two—a boy and a girl. The boy a merry fellow with plenty of fun and full of hope for the future; the girl an awful romp and a bit of a tom-boy. Do you remember?"

"Do I remember?" said Michael Hepburn. "But she was not a tom-boy nor a romp—just the sweetest little lady in the world."

"So you think that still, and yet you want to throw me over? No, be quiet," she added hastily as he ventured to speak. "You must hear me out. Well, these two characters in this very pretty and entertaining play saw a lot of each other, and, as

always happens, fell in love. The heroine knew about it first; she always does; and she waited and waited for the hero to show his hand."

"And the hero was a dolt—a great big fumbling dolt—and very, very slow," said Michael with a laugh, all his troubles for the time forgotten as she transported him back to happier days.

"Now, please do not interrupt. A long time after the heroine's discovery—I think it was two days—the hero disclosed his passion by giving her a ring—a small metal ring bought from the village store. And the curtain of the first act comes down, he looking embarrassed at the enormity of his deed, she smiling raptures at the thought of her conquest. Five days elapse, and then act two. Scene, a silvern glade, with the duckiest of babbling brooks and an old summer-house with a thatched roof. Do you remember we called it our snuggery?"

"By jove, yes! The dear old snuggery! Those were the happiest days of my life, Dorothy."

"You still think that? I should have thought, by your words to me to-night, that you had forgotten all about it. No, I refuse to hear a word. You've got to hear me out. With act two comes tragedy. The hero suddenly receives his marching orders to India, and in the midst of happiness there comes sorrow. And this is where the third and last character comes in. Do you remember Marie Macpherson?"

"Of course. Dear old Mac! She helped us in our affair no end."

"Yes, she was a brick. I confided in her, and she said I wasn't to trust you—she had no faith in men; she was jilted when she was a girl. But she

liked you, and called you 'My verra dear laddie.' She told me that you were the sort of man who would not go back on your oath, and she suggested that she should marry us in the Scotch fashion. Do you remember how we laughed at her? But she had her way in the end. And the great scene took place in the dear little summer-house with the thatched roof, with the music of the brook in our ears. I shall never forget that night, Michael. I was in my seventh heaven of delight, and the only thing that marred my happiness was the thought that soon you would leave me. Do you remember the strange oaths she made us take? I can see dear old Mac now, with her silver hair and large horned-rimmed spectacles and the great Bible in her hand. Do you remember how she made us say long sentences after her, half of which we did not understand? And then how you produced the ring, and, holding it together, we swore to be true to each other to the end, and how we kissed it and you kissed me? And after that, Michael, you want to give me up. You are very cruel."

She turned from him, and, burying her head in a cushion, burst into tears.

Michael Hepburn leant forward and laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"Little lady," said he, "I was acting for the best. I thought it the only way out for you. God knows it cost me an effort. These scenes that you have spoken of to-night—I have gone over them a hundred times out there in the wilds, and longed for the time when I could come home to England and marry you. But I thought after what had happened to me that I should be a cad to keep you to your

promise. I did not know that you would feel it so much. It makes it harder for me now to do the right thing. But one thing is certain. I must not ruin your life."

Dorothy looked up with a tear-stained face.

" You will ruin my life if you give me up. I love you, Michael. Without you I do not wish to live."

" You will think differently in a few years."

" I am not one to change. If I had been, the news of your failure would have changed me. Oh! Michael, you are a great big boy and ignorant of the world to think that because a man has had a piece of bad luck his lover will throw him up. She would not be his lover if she did. True love is made of stronger stuff than that. You must not give me up, Michael."

She laid a hand upon his coat and turned towards him pleadingly. For a moment he hesitated and then took her in his arms.

" My darling," said he, kissing her, " you are the kindest little lady in the world. If you wish it it shall be, although somehow my conscience tells me I am doing wrong. I will not give you up if the whole world is against me. I will make good somehow, and when that happens I will marry you."

" And we must see each other often."

" Yes, yes," drying her tears with a silk handkerchief. " Yes. But not in this house. Where shall I meet you? "

" Oh, let's see. Where's a nice place? " She snuggled up closer under the protection of the strong arm. " What about Clarge's—Clarge's in Regent Street? I just love those great round chocolate cakes. To-day's Monday. To-morrow I must go

to the Dobson's for tennis. Let's fix Wednesday at four o'clock. It will be glorious."

She sat up and clapped her hands, her face radiant at the thought.

" Very well then, Dorothy," said Michael. " I'll meet you at Clarge's, Regent Street, at four o'clock on Wednesday. It's a bargain."

A light footstep behind the shrubs interrupted their *tête-à-tête*, and the next moment a man pushed his way through the foliage and stood before them. He was a small man, faultlessly dressed, and wearing a monocle. At first sight you would write him down a fop, but on closer scrutiny you would judge from the dreamy look in his eyes that he was a dreamer and a poet. Such he was. He acted as the General's secretary when he was wanted, and in his spare moments wrote unpublishable plays in highfalutin blank verse.

" Well, Longstaff," said Dorothy, when he paused and looked at them dreamily, " what do you want ? "

" A thousand apologies, Miss West," said he with a drawl. " I'm touched to the quick to have to break in upon you like this, but the General sent me to find Mr. Hepburn. He wishes to speak to you at once, sir."

He looked towards Michael with a look of fear, as though there might be a scene.

" If you will be so kind, Mr. Hepburn, as to follow me, I will take you to him directly."

Michael rose to his feet.

" I will come at once. Lead on, Mr. Longstaff. It would be a pity to keep the General waiting."

As the secretary turned to make his way back

through the shrubbery Michael stooped down to Dorothy.

"Wednesday at four o'clock, darling," he whispered. "I shall live for that hour."

And, kissing her tenderly, he turned and followed the secretary.

For a few minutes Dorothy sat immovable, lost in thought. Then she suddenly sat up and searched for something on the settee. She found it at last—a little gold vanity bag.

"It will be a horrible fight with dad," she told herself, "but in the end I shall get my way. And Michael will make good, I know he will. And everything will go smoothly——" She paused, for a presentiment of coming trouble came to her, and the laughter that had come into her eyes disappeared. "And if it doesn't," was her thought, "I will see it through."

The strains of a waltz floated out to her, and she remembered that she had been away a long time from the ballroom and would be missed. And so with rapid fingers, and the aid of the contents of her vanity bag, she set to work to remedy the *débâcle* the tears of a few minutes ago had made of her pretty face.

CHAPTER FOUR

I HAVE NO USE FOR FAILURES

Sir Edward Banks the lawyer held his glass of port up to the light and examined it with the eyes of a connoisseur, and then, having tasted it and fixed its age in his mind as sixty years old at least, he looked across the table at the General. The latter was rapping impatiently upon its polished surface with his fingers.

"Don't be too hard on the boy, Frank," said the lawyer appealingly. "He has made a slip. We all make slips sometimes."

"A slip where lives are concerned is unforgiveable," said the General coldly. "And as for giving him another chance, that would not be fair on my little girl."

"With all due deference to you, Frank," said Sir Edward, "the Army is not the only career open to the boy. From what I hear he has good stuff in him, and may make good at something else."

"You think that because you do not know the boy as I do. I have known him since he was breeched and I tell you—and I am a judge of men, Edward—that he is a born soldier, and will fail in anything else he undertakes. There is no hope for him. He is a failure, Edward, and I have no use for failures."

"And Dorothy? How will she take it if you turn him from your house?"

"She will soon forget, like all young people who make entanglements before they are old enough

to reason. Anyway, this stupid boy and girl affair has got to come to an end, and I am going to see that it comes to an end. I am a proud man, Edward. My family record is a good one. I am not going to have it tarnished. Besides, I love Dorothy too well to see her married unhappily. She has had every luxury, and this fellow Hepburn will never be in a position to make her happy. I shall fight this match with all my force, and, by God ! I will prevent it."

And the General brought his fist down upon the table with such force that the port glasses jumped about upon the silver tray. Sir Edward Banks did not reply. His eyes wandered about the room. The whole place spoke of riches, from the great gold masterpieces upon the walls to the great Louis Quinze cabinets, with their contents of priceless pottery. No, was his thought, it would be a pity if his little godchild Dorothy, who was pampered and spoilt with luxury, should marry a poor man. No good would come of it. The General was right ; he would have to prevent it.

The door opened as he sat thinking, and turning, he saw the martial figure of Michael Hepburn standing in the opening. He rose to his feet.

" I will leave you, Frank," said he, laying a hand upon the General's shoulder. " Remember, you were young once, my boy."

He passed out and closed the door behind him.

" You sent for me, General," said Michael as the door clicked to.

" Yes. I will not keep you long, Mr. Hepburn. Take a seat and a glass of port. No ? Very well then, I will come to the point. I have reason to believe that before you sailed to India there was a

sort of engagement between you and my little girl?"

"That is quite correct, General."

"And if you had made a success of your career I should have been most happy to have favoured it."

He saw Michael wince, and a look of sadness come into his face, but this did not affect him, or soften the speech that followed.

"You have made a sad mess of your career," he continued in a cold voice. "You had the makings of a soldier; I had great hopes for you in the Army. Now that is closed to you. I do not think that you will succeed in anything else. I love my little girl; she has great prospects. What have you to offer her, Mr. Hepburn?"

A great feeling of despondency came to Michael as he looked down upon the man who spoke so directly, and regardless of hurting his feelings.

"Perhaps he is right," was his thought. "Supposing my life is one long failure. Supposing I am never in a position to give Dorothy the home that will make her happy. I should have been firmer with her. I meant to do the right thing when I came here to-night." And then the words came back to him, "You will ruin my life if you give me up. I love you, Michael. Without you I do not wish to live," and his feeling of despondency was gone in a moment. By God! after those words he would not give her up for any man.

"Well, Mr. Hepburn," said the General, fixing him with his cold grey eyes, as though he tried to read his innermost thoughts. "You have not answered my question yet. What have you to offer my little girl?"

"The day I take Dorothy from you, General," said Michael calmly, "I shall be in a position to offer a home worthy of her."

"Pish! You talk like a green schoolboy," said the General irritably. "Fortunes are not made in a day. Besides, my little girl is not going to wait for a chance that will never mature. She has great prospects of marrying well, and I am going to see that she marries well. I will have nothing to do with this silly boy and girl attachment. It must end."

"Surely that is Dorothy's affair, not yours, General?"

"Dammit!" striking the table. "My little girl is too dutiful to disobey me."

"And if she does?"

"She shall not. Anyway, she will get no encouragement from me. From to-night I forbid you the house."

Michael turned towards the door, and with his hand upon the handle looked back.

"Then it's going to be open warfare, General," said he. "I'm glad. I hate anything underhand. I shall not come again to your house, but I shall see Dorothy outside on every occasion that she cares to come to me. And our engagement shall not come to an end until she breaks it of her own free will. Good-night."

He went out without turning back and closed the door. For a long time after he had gone the General sat deep in thought. Presently he sat up with a jump, a look of excitement in his eyes.

"Of her own free will—until she breaks it of her own free will," he cried. "By jove! the fellow has

suggested the plan of action with his own words." He rose quickly from his chair and crossed the room to a large mahogany writing-desk. Opening one of the drawers, he searched amongst a heap of manuscripts, and presently, finding what he wanted, took it out and laid it on the blotting pad. It was a bundle of letters tied about with a faded piece of ribbon. He undid it reverently, and, taking a letter from the bundle, opened it and folded it out in front of him, then, taking a pen, began to copy from it carefully and laboriously.

CHAPTER FIVE

A GENTLEMAN'S GENTLEMAN

THERE are some men who have such a love and pride for their calling that nothing will deter them from following it to the end. No discomforts or offerings of better things will make them give it up. It never occurs to them that they are giving their life to an occupation that may be lowly, and that if perhaps they sought for better things they might attain them. They were born a blacksmith, or a tailor, or a servant, and such they will be to the end of the chapter. And these men are the happiest in the end if they only knew it, for true happiness lies in knowing that the task you have undertaken is the one most suited to your efforts. That way lies success, and the other certain failure. It is better to be a successful blacksmith or tailor or servant than to be a struggling something better. The one brings happiness, the other misery. And such a man was Harry Hawkins, once a private and batman in Her Majesty's Army, now retired and a batman still. He was the ideal batman—one who knew every little desire and want of the officer he served. A change of officers seemed to make no difference ; he made it his business to find out all his new master's little fads and fancies before he commenced his duties. He was not one who had to be told to do this and do that if anything was wanted to be done. His instinct seemed to tell him that such and such was wanted. If you came in tired and hungry after a late night it was not necessary beforehand to order a hot drink

or a cool drink according to the state of the weather. It was always ready, and Private Harry Hawkins up to serve it. Then he was an expert in his work. No officer on parade was turned out as smart and shining as the one Harry turned out. A pair of boots was his pet joy, and he was never so happy as when he had a pair to polish. There was a story told of him, the truth of which I am not in a position to verify. Anyway, here it is for what it is worth. Once, when his regiment was in camp under canvas in a certain district known for its winds, an extra special tornado swept across the encamping ground and laid everything flat. A certain officer, name unknown, made his way anxiously to his tent with an idea of rescuing his goods and chattels. When he reached the wreckage he saw something moving about underneath. He lifted the fallen canvas to one side, expecting to see a stray dog that had been caught by the falling tent, and to his surprise saw Harry seated upon a box and polishing a pair of boots.

" Hallo, Hawkins," said he. " What in heaven's name are you doing here ? "

" Just finishing these 'ere boots, sir," said Harry, unperturbed. " If I stopped now they'd be spoilt for ever. It's like stopping when you're pulling through a rifle barrel, sir. You leave a spot which is the very devil to get out afterwards. In a few minutes I'll 'ave these 'ere boots as clear as a mirror, sir, what your missus could do 'er back 'air in. Then I'll soon 'ave your tent and things in order, sir, so that you won't know there's ever been no whirlwind."

The story goes to show that once he undertook

a thing he would carry it out under any circumstances. If he made up his mind to do a thing it was done, no matter how tedious or difficult the task might be.

To-night he sat upon the end of a camp-bed polishing a pair of brown walking shoes. He accompanied his work by whistling the *Marseillaise*—the only song he ever used when at work. "It's a rare 'un to bring the shine out," was his motto. The room he occupied was small, with sloping walls, which proclaimed it an attic. Its furniture consisted of one camp-bed before mentioned, an old chest of drawers, and a desk which in bygone years had been handsome, but with years was scratched and chipped and its brass handles missing. Behind the door were pegs, upon which hung a mixed kit of khaki and civilian clothes.

Having finished the shoes to his liking, Harry rose and put them at the foot of the bed. This procedure took a good few minutes, for the putting of them there was not the be-all and the end-all of the task. Four other pairs of shining boots stood all in a row, and these had to be dressed in line. The following monologue ensued: "Number one—you with the brown shoes—stand fast. Number two—you with the riding boots—forward a little—more, more, more; that's it. Number three—you with the dancing pumps—back a few inches; that's it, my beauty. Number four—you with the tennis boots—back too. Now you've gone too far, you idiot—up, up, up; that's it, stand fast and don't you move, or it'll be three months' cells. Number five—you with the marching boots—you've sort of sneaked in right, as you always do."

Then, stepping back, he surveyed the whole with critical eye. "Yes, you'll do," was his verdict. "A blinking General wouldn't find no fault with you now."

And, having made this last decision, he turned away. The papers on the desk caught his eye. It was littered about with loose sheets of manuscript—a state of untidiness that sent a shudder down his back. Untidiness was his pet aversion. He crossed the room quickly, and, gathering the papers together, arranged them in a neat pile. Then he opened a drawer, and was about to place them in when his eyes caught sight of something that made him pause and give a low whistle. For a few seconds he stood staring down into the drawer, then he lifted the object out. It was a service Webly. He deposited the manuscript in the top left-hand drawer, and, turning his attention to the pistol, he ejected it open, and six heavy bullets were flung in different directions. He whistled softly again, and stood staring blankly at the empty revolver in his hand.

"Umph!" he muttered aloud. "Them's as safe as a pop-gun when a man's on top. But when a man's down—why, they're dangerous as 'ell."

For a moment or two he stood indecisive, then suddenly he went down upon his hands and knees, and, collecting the six bullets that had scattered on the floor, slipped them into his pocket. That done, he turned his attention to the drawers in the desk, and when he had hunted a few minutes he gave a sigh of relief and pulled out a box. It was a small box, and the lid had been broken off, disclosing rows of lead-nosed bullets.

"It's the only one 'e's got, and 'e's going to lose 'em till times get better."

And so saying, he slipped the box as well into his pocket.

"Thank Gawd! I found them," was his prayer. "It might have been too late."

He turned from the desk and crossed to the mantelshelf. A silver photo frame stood there, with the portrait of a girl. He took it down and looked at it reverently.

"Poor little woman!" he muttered several times, and then, "Guess you'll feel it. There's trouble brewing for you, if my name ain't 'Arry 'Awkins. Some'ow I feels as though you won't give him the chuck though. No, you ain't that sort."

A footstep on the floor outside made him deposit it rather hastily and pick up another—one of a boy, a handsome-looking boy in the teens, mounted upon a horse and wearing a sun-helmet.

The next moment the door opened and Michael Hepburn entered.

"Hallo, Harry," said he. "You ought to have gone to bed. What in heaven's name are you doing?"

"Polishing up your photo, sir. Thought as 'ow you might want something. Wouldn't a nice little snack of cocoa suit you, sir?"

"No, thank you, Harry, not to-night," coming in and closing the door. "By the way, Harry, you've decided to stay with me, then? I feel bound to tell you that you're only wasting your time. I'm sorry to inform you that my exchequer cannot run to a batman—but I shall be devilish sorry to lose you. Now what about that job as commissionaire I suggested. I can fix you up, and with your pension you'll be as snug as the proverbial 'bug in a rug.'"

" And to that proverbial bug in a rug I says nothing doin', sir. I ain't one to desert the company when it's got into a tight place, with its line of communications cut, sir, so to speak. I'm staying on, thank you kindly, sir. One of these days we'll rout the enemy, and I can have my share of the loot then, sir. I'm your batman—have been close on five years—and your batman I'm going to be until they detail a firing party for Private 'Arry 'Awkins, sir."

Michael had seated himself at the table and was fingering the blotting pad preparatory to writing.

" Dammit, Harry," said he, without looking up, " you're one of the best ! I hope you won't regret it though ? "

" Regret it ? Not me, sir," said Harry with emphasis. " I loves me job too much to regret it. It's an 'obby to me, sir, that's what it is. An indiluted 'obby. Give me a pair of boots to polish and I'm as 'appy as a schoolboy."

" By the way, Harry, what have you done with my manuscript ? "

" In the top left-hand drawer," said Harry, looking anxiously towards the desk.

" Thank you."

Michael opened the drawer and looked in, but he did not take the manuscript out, but sat staring instead at something within.

Harry, on tenterhooks, edged towards the door.

" If there's nothing I can do for you, sir," said he with trepidation, " I'll be getting along to the club."

" Wait ! "

Michael drew forth the revolver and jerked it open.

" It's an extraordinary thing, but this revolver

was loaded when I went out this afternoon," said he, fixing his eyes on Harry.

" Careless of me," said Harry, shifting from one leg to the other and fingering his cap nervously. " Took it outside to clean ; must 'ave dropped 'em while I was about it, sir, and didn't notice it."

" Oh, very careless of you, Harry."

He turned to the desk again and ransacked the drawers.

" There was also a box of cartridges here, Harry," said he presently, turning again towards the by now much embarrassed batman. " I suppose you took those outside to clean, and dropped them while you were about it, and didn't notice it, eh ? Now look here, Harry. I appreciate your care for me, and I quite see what was in your mind. But I'm not one of those darn fools who blow their brains out because their luck is out. I look upon this as a piece of impudence. Don't let it happen again. Do you understand ? "

" Perfectly, sir."

" Very well. Good-night, Harry."

" Good-night, sir."

When the door closed to Michael sat back and laughed softly to himself.

" Well, I'm damned," said he presently. " Harry has the impudence of the devil. I'm not one for that sort of thing. If Dorothy had thrown me over to-night—I wonder ? Anyway, it's a piece of infernal cheek. Dammit, he's a—he's a—God bless him ! "

And he turned to the manuscript before him and commenced to alter passages here and there as he read.

CHAPTER SIX

A MESSAGE FROM THE EAST

MICHAEL HEPBURN was not one to cave in under the heavy hand of misfortune. There were times when he felt his position almost unbearable—to be looked down on by other men when your spirit is a proud one goes hard—but a premonition that somehow all would come right kept him going. After that terrible morning when he had awakened to find the orders that he had disobeyed lying upon his tiny camp table he knew that his career was at an end, and he commenced to make his plans for the future. After the court-martial at Delhi and the still more terrible promulgation he had put his plans into operation. The result was that three months later, when he landed in England, his history of the Jillapur campaign was nearly completed. He doubted his ability as a scribe—in fact it was his first essay at authorship—but it was the only means of making a livelihood after soldiering that occurred to him. He would try it; if it failed—well, there were other occupations, and he must try until he found the right one to suit his capabilities. After the never-to-be-forgotten meeting with Dorothy he had returned with renewed heart, and by sitting up till three in the morning he had finished the work. As he put the last finishing touches to the manuscript a great hope rose in his heart. If only one of the publishing firms would take it, perhaps he would not have to keep Dorothy waiting so long after all. The sun was coming up in the east when he went to bed,

but he fell to sleep immediately, tired out with his day's exertions. When he woke the next morning Harry Hawkins stood by his bedside with a cup of steaming tea in his hand.

"It's twelve o'clock, sir. The day's going to be a corkin' fine one," said he. "And here's something to make you as fresh as a daisy." He deposited the cup upon a small camp table and held forth the inevitable cigarette that Michael always liked when first awakening.

"Thank you, Harry," said Michael.

"And breakfast's ready when you are, sir."

"Give me ten minutes, Harry,"

"Very good, sir."

And, sitting back against the pillows amid a cloud of smoke, Michael remembered his day's mission. He must find a publisher for his book. But how? A difficulty presented itself to him. He knew no one in the publishing line. He thought about it all the time he was dressing, and when seated at the table with a couple of boiled eggs in front of him he had an inspiration.

"Harry."

"Yes, sir?" said the batman, entering with his arm hidden in a riding boot. "Any little thing I can do, sir?"

"Yes. You've got to find me a publisher."

"A publisher, sir? Now if you'd said a pub."

"A publisher, Harry. A man who makes books, and sends them to the shops to be sold. Pretty books, with fine bindings and pictures."

"Certainly, sir. I'll go out and find one, and bring him along."

"Idiot! I want you to find the name of one only,

also his address, and bring it back to me. And by the way, Harry, a library or a book shop is a good quarter to apply to, not a butcher's or a hat-shop."

"Very good, sir. I'll fix you all right."

Two hours later, when Harry returned, he seemed very satisfied with himself.

"Guess I've fixed it all right, sir," said he, beaming.

"Where did you get the information?"

"At a rag-and-bone merchant's, sir."

"What?"

"Well, you see, sir, it's like this. I've got a friend who deals in rags and bones——"

"How in the devil's name can he know of a publisher? I was a fool to have sent you."

"If you would only give me time, sir, I'll explain. This bone-and-rag merchant——"

"To blazes with bones and rags!"

"This bone-and-rag merchant lets rooms, sir. And there is a young gentleman staying with him who writes. They say he's a wunner, and makes a good living out of it. He's a co-respondent and works for the papers. He's a nice young fellow, sir, and saw me at once. I've got a list of a few notes he gave me."

"Well?" said Michael, laughing in spite of himself.

"Firstly," reading from a sheet of foolscap. "Tell your master that if the work in question is a novel of adventure to send it to Blundel or Tomkins & Webb."

"It's not a novel."

"Secondly, if it's a naughty novel with plenty of spice to send it to——"

" It's not in that category either, Harry. It's historical. Have you got any notes in that line? "

Harry Hawkins scratched his head of unruly bright red hair and looked nonplussed.

" Can't say as I've got anything in that line, sir," said he despondently. " Of course, ' Comic '— that would hardly apply, sir, would it? I've got a long list under that head. Five names. No good, sir? That's a pity. Well, how would ' Memoirs, etc.,' do? Yes, your type must come under etc., sir."

" Well, who have you got under that heading, Harry? "

" Two names, sir. Mapperly & Thrubb and Hardy & Gloss."

" That's good, Harry. I'll go and see them this afternoon. You've done exceedingly well, and I'm much indebted to you."

The house of Mapperly & Thrubb seemed a prosperous one if judged by the luxuriousness of the chief's sanctum. Michael found himself in a room, the entire floor covered with a rich Turkish carpet, and a suite of Chippendale that would have made the collector's mouth water. He waited anxiously for the coming of the great publishers' representative, and he was nervous. This business was not in his line. Once or twice he looked toward the door with the idea of sneaking away, but before he could put the idea into action the door opened and a small man wearing a pair of pince-nez entered and announced himself as Mr. Mapperly, the senior partner. Michael floundered when he announced the reason for his visit. He had meant to state his mission in a few short sentences, but he

was conscious of breaking into long, unnecessary explanations. Mr. Mapperly sat with folded hands and peered at him over the top of his pince-nez in a manner that was most disconcerting. He became more embarrassed as he floundered on, and presently, when he wound up finally, all the romantic dreams of placing his book and making a fortune faded away.

"And so this is the story of the Jillapur campaign," said Mr. Mapperly after a short silence. "I'm afraid there is a very small market for that sort of thing. Very few people in this island have ever heard of Jillapur or the campaign. We are a peculiar nation. We rule a large Empire and never even worry our heads as to what's taking place there. No, I am afraid there is very little chance for your book, Mr. Hepburn."

Michael with a feeling of despair collected his hat and stick and rose to his feet.

"I am sorry we cannot do business, Mr. Mapperly," said he. "I built hopes on this work of mine."

"I am sorry, Mr. Hepburn," said the publisher. He knew Michael's story and felt sorry for him.

"Now I have said there is very little chance for your book, but I did not say there was no chance at all. I will read it, Mr. Hepburn. It is my boast that I read every book submitted to me. I give every author a chance. I owe my success to that. I have waded through a lot of dross in my time, but here and there I have come across the golden metal that has well repaid my pains. Yes, assuredly I will read your book."

A new hope came to Michael. Perhaps this little

man would find the work worth printing after all, and a happy vista presented itself to him, with work for his hand to do and money for his needs beyond.

He handed the manuscript to Mr. Mapperly and departed. It was seven of the clock when he left the publishers', and he remembered that he was very hungry. When he reached the Piccadilly Restaurant he stood by the great swing doors, hesitating. A brief survey of his monetary position reminded him that fifty pounds stood between him and starvation. Precaution warned him that a few sandwiches at a cheaper restaurant was the saner course, but to-night was different somehow. Had he not left a manuscript that was going to set him on his feet with a great publishing firm? He gave precaution the go-by and passed through the swing doors.

It was years since he had dined in a fashionable restaurant. Before he sailed for India he had dined with Dorothy at the Ritz—that never to be forgotten dinner—a farewell dinner, and they had drunk to his success and his quick return. He had returned, but he came as a failure, and a pang seized him when he pictured the might-have-been.

He found a table and sat down. Since his return to England he had led a secluded life, for the smallness of his purse would not permit otherwise, and he found it very pleasant to find himself amongst a fashionable crowd again. The sight of the pretty dresses, and the jewels, and the lights, and the flowers, exhilarated him. The poorness of his attic quarters, and his plain living and penury, were forgotten. For a time he lived again. The band

struck up a lively air, and he ordered the dinner, and a bottle of wine, as he was wont to do in more prosperous days.

Presently he fell to wondering if it would be his luck to make good as these people about him had made good. Surely it was in him. He remembered that some men placed as he was never made good, but sank lower and lower under the hand of misfortune until they reached the depths. Would he be numbered with them? It was a momentary thought, and out of keeping with the place, and was soon forgotten. The brightness and gayness of his surroundings and the tuneful music of the band helped him to look on the bright side of things, and he soon found himself building castles in the air.

He was half way through his dinner when he caught sight of two men at a table a few yards away whispering to each other. They had two pretty girls with them, and it struck him that they were casting many glances towards his table. He watched them, careful not to be seen, and discovered that they were obviously discussing him. His story was known to them, he was sure, by the way they looked at him. Wherever he went, then, he was to meet people who knew his past and singled him out with looks of contempt. And in an instant the bright place, with its flowers and music and merry diners, became abhorrent to him. He did not finish his dinner, but rose blindly to his feet, paid his bill, and went out. In the street his old misery came upon him—the misery of shattered hopes. It occurred to him that even if he made his name as an author the fact of his being turned out of the Army would always remain and spoil his

successes. The striking words of Omar came to him.

> The moving finger writes, and having writ
> Moves on. Nor all thy piety or wit
> Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
> Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.

So it would be with him—to the end. If only he could wash it out! But it seemed to him an impossibility.

When he reached West Kensington and turned into Arlington Road, where his attic quarters were situated, he felt very miserable. Number fifty-four was the number of his lodging. Arriving at the doorway, he saw that a light was burning in his window.

"Harry waiting for me as usual," was his thought.

He mounted the stone steps that led up to his attic, and, opening the door, was surprised to find his room in darkness.

"Hallo, Harry," he called. No answer. Again, "Harry, where the devil are you?" And when there was still no answer he walked in and lit the gas.

"That's funny," he told himself, looking around the room. "He should have passed me on the stairs."

A brief survey of the room told him that someone had been there other than Harry. The drawers of his desk were all open and the papers scattered about. A sudden fear seized him, and he crossed quickly to the desk. A quick search and he found what he wanted—a small bag that tinkled as he lifted it out. He loosened the string and emptied its contents out upon the blotting pad. A pile of golden coins

rattled out with a musical ring. He counted them.

"All correct. Well, whoever's been here did not come to rob me," was his thought. "I was a dolt to leave them about, though. To-morrow I must put them in a bank."

He made a further search of the room, and presently discovered that his photo was missing from the mantelshelf.

A low whistle escaped him.

"What in the name of wonder could they want with that?" he told himself, and made a search. But it could not be found. The photo of himself as a boy was gone.

"Hallo, sir. You're back earlier than I expected."

The sound of the voice made Michael turn quickly.

"Hallo, Harry," said he. "You're just in time. Have you by any chance taken my photo outside to clean and forgotten it?"

"Your photo, sir? No, sir. I haven't touched it."

"Well, when you were out someone's been here and played havoc with my papers. They've left fifty pounds, which they must have seen, and gone off with a worthless photo which cost about twelve shillings a dozen. Can you make head or tail of it, Harry?"

"It's got me beat, sir," said Harry, scratching the back of his head, an inveterate practice when he was nonplussed. "It's a regular corker. A nice little case for Sherlock 'Olmes, sir. But, anyway, as the money's safe I don't see as 'ow——"

A cry from Michael brought him to a full stop. He had seen something bright shining beneath the

desk, and with an exclamation of " Here's a clue ! " had pounced upon it. The next moment he was holding a small dagger in his hand, a dagger with a curved blade and an ivory handle. He examined it carefully and handed it to the batman.

" Do you know what this is, Harry ? " he asked.

Harry Hawkins examined it closely, but no awakening light of recognition came into his stolid face.

" I should call it a sticker," said he after a few minutes' scrutiny.

" A sticker ? "

" Yes, sir. One of them things you use to stick into a man you don't like, or into a tin of bully which you do like."

" Oh, get out with you," said Michael, taking back the dagger from his batman's hand. " Get off, and get me something to drink. You're inclined to be facetious, and you're an idiot."

" Very good, sir."

When the batman had gone upon his mission Michael took the dagger and examined it closely under the gas. The handle was beautifully carved, but there was nothing upon it to give him information. He turned his attention to the steel work, and after careful scrutiny found a tiny incision in the steel close to the ivory work. It was difficult to read, for the wording was so minute, but presently he made out the word Umbarra.

" Umbarra ? " thought Michael. " Why, that's on the north-west frontier of India." And a picture of a rough, rugged country at the foot of the hills presented itself to him. Who in Umbarra could be interested in him, and why in heaven's name should

he want to come to his house and take a cheap photo? The thing was a mystery—a mystery to which there was no explanation. Anyway, as Harry said, the money which stood between him and starvation was safe, and when Harry entered presently with a steaming cup of cocoa he threw the dagger to one side and troubled his head about it no longer.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WEDNESDAY AT FOUR O'CLOCK

WHEN Michael awoke the next morning the incident of the night before was entirely forgotten. One thing he remembered only—he was to meet Dorothy again. It was a red-letter day for him, and joy was in his heart. He could remember nothing else, and counted the minutes till the clock should strike the hour of four. He remembered he had gone to her two days back and had expected to see her for the last time. Now he was going to see her again, and she had refused positively to release him from their engagement, just like the brick she was. The memory of those joyous days before he had sailed to India to join his regiment there came strong upon him. He saw again the General's pretty house at Sonning amidst the trees. He remembered how kind the old man had been when his mother had died and left him an orphan; how he had taken him into his house for the remaining year before his final exams—a year in which he and Dorothy had been playmates, and in the end lovers. He pictured Dorothy again running wild in the woods with him. He saw her again as she was with those two large auburn plaits that always came undone and tangled towards the end of their day's outing. What outings they had had, what expeditions in the woods and on the river. Life was all sunshine then. And then he remembered the day—the day of all days—when he discovered that Dorothy was more to him than a playmate and that he loved her.

It came back to him very distinctly. They were seated in the snuggery, the quaint old summer-house with the thatched roof and windows of coloured glass. The sun was setting, and the hush of a glorious summer evening was in the woods. He remembered she was very merry that evening, and he expected to increase her pleasure when he told her the news. He had kept it for this moment; it would have been sacrilege to have told her anywhere else. For months it had been the custom to meet in this house in the woods and tell each other their secrets. He had received a wire that morning informing him that he had been appointed to a regiment in India and was to sail in six days' time. He had been with her all day, but he kept it for this hour. And here in their sanctum he told her the news, and expected a glad little cry from her and a hug and kiss. Instead she had turned from him and burst into tears. Then it was that he realised what parting with her would really mean, and in that moment he knew that he loved her.

Then had followed glorious days of bliss, to be followed penultimately with the marriage scene two days later. Dear old Mac! What had become of her now, he wondered. He saw her again as she was on that evening, her old grey curls flopping down upon the large black Bible, as she tried to read in the dim light of the snuggery. And the quaint things she had made them repeat after her, very solemnly, and in a voice that was very serious; becoming her, no doubt, as officiating priestess.

These thoughts brought gladness into his heart, and he actually sang as he splashed in the water that Harry had poured into a canvas bath. And this

worthy, coming in presently with a couple of eggs and a pot of tea upon a tray, set it down with an exclamation of approval.

" Bravo, sir," said he. " It does my heart good to hear you sing again. It's like old days, sir. If you'll only go into battle like that, sir, we'll soon rout this old enemy that's got us by the heels, so to speak."

" You're a better cook than a philosopher, Harry," said Michael with a laugh. " In five minutes I shall do justice to that breakfast you've prepared."

The rest of the day went very slowly to Michael, and he spent it fitfully between reading and looking out of the window. Strange to say, although he had so much time to spare he was five minutes late when he reached Clarge's.

He walked into the rooms and searched for Dorothy, but she had not arrived yet, so he went back into the porch to await her arrival. Many taxis drove up and deposited a pretty girl at the doorway, and every time his heart was in a whirl in case it should be Dorothy. But he was disappointed, and when the clock struck the half hour she had not come.

" Why are women always late ? " was his thought. He remembered in the old, happier days she was always late, but to-day somehow he had expected otherwise. She would be here any minute. But when the clock struck five he began to doubt, and a great feeling of depression came upon him. This was to be a reunion—a sign that Dorothy would keep to the promise. Had she changed her mind ? Surely she would come to-day of all days if that were not so. The depression grew as the minutes

passed. And then the thought came to him that perhaps she was ill and could not get away. Half past five. She would not come now. Blindly he turned away from the place and made his way West. He had given his promise that he would not enter the General's house, and enter it he would not. But he made his way there with the hope that perhaps from the outside he might catch sight of Dorothy at one of the windows and get a message from her.

When he reached Park Lane he saw a motor-car drawn up outside number ten, where the General lived, and he passed it on the opposite side with his eyes on the windows of the house. A voice hailed him from the car, and, looking across, he saw the hon. Bertie Charters hailing him. He walked across the road.

"Hallo, Hepburn," cried the hon. Bertie. "Paying a call, eh? It's no good; they are all out. Dorothy and the General have gone for a motor trip."

"A motor trip?" repeated Michael, the news bringing despair to his heart. Dorothy had changed her mind, then.

"Yes; gone picnicking among the vales of beautiful Bucks," said the hon. Bertie, wondering at the other's look of disappointment. "Jump in, and I'll take you back to the club."

Mechanically Michael got in beside the hon. Bertie. He did not like the man, and was not anxious to go to his club, but he might hear something more of Dorothy, and that prompted his action.

"Jolly girl, Dorothy," said the hon. Bertie when he had started the car and moved the gears into

top. "You saw something of her, I understand, before you went to India?"

"Yes, I was lucky," said Michael. "The General took pity on me when my mother died, and took me under his roof for a year."

"And you saw a lot of Dorothy? Those must have been jolly days."

"They were," said Michael. He had an idea that the hon. Bertie was trying to pump him, and he determined to be non-committal.

"I suppose when the time came you were rather sorry to leave?" said the hon. Bertie as they turned into Regent Street.

"I suppose I was," said Michael. "But I was keen to join my regiment, of course."

For a few minutes there was silence between them.

"I suppose you've heard the gossip going round," said the hon. Bertie presently.

"Gossip?" queried Michael.

"Yes. That Dorothy and I are going to get married."

Michael did not answer. The news—he did not see any reason to doubt it—stunned him. Then this was the explanation of Dorothy's non-appearance this afternoon. She had changed her mind, and had not the courage to tell him.

"Yes," continued the hon. Bertie, unconscious of his companion's suffering. "Yes, it's all over the Town. And there's a lot of truth in it. I thought you would like to know somehow; that's why I told you."

They had come to the Circus by this time, and a blockage in the traffic held them up. Michael opened the door and got out.

"Thanks for the lift, Charters," he muttered. "I will come to the club some other time."

And blindly, scarce knowing where he went, he plunged into the crowd that was making its way along Regent Street.

The hon. Bertie leant back in his car and watched him go.

"Poor devil," he muttered. "I'm afraid he's made a terrible hash of things. But I did the right thing to tell him; it would not have been fair to have kept the news from him."

And the traffic moving on, he drove leisurely to his club.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A BREAKDOWN

THE General came down to breakfast and found a note on his plate. He was very irritable in the early hours of the morning, and the sight of the neatly folded billet addressed in his secretary's clear hand brought forth an exclamation of disgust.

"Why can't the infernal idiot leave business till I've had a meal?" he muttered.

He picked up the note and flung it into the grate. Then he rang the bell and settled down to reading the paper. A manservant entered and silently set a plate of fish before him, and poured out a large cup of coffee. It was one of the peculiarities of the General that he always had the same breakfast morning after morning throughout the year—a sole and coffee.

The man, having attended to his wants, waited politely for the General to look up from his paper, but the latter was deep in an article on his favourite theme—administration of the Indian Army. After a few minutes' waiting the man coughed slightly. No answer. Then, taking courage in both hands:

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"Humph!" muttered the General. "Get out. I've got all I want."

"Excuse me, sir," said the man, trembling visibly, "but there was a note."

"Damn the note!" roared the General.

"A note that was most important, and Mr. Longstaff said I was to be certain you got it, sir."

And, so saying, the man fled precipitately, to carry the news downstairs no doubt that the barometer for the day marked stormy weather.

The General did not move; he read his article through to the end. Then, rising, he walked to the grate and recovered the despised note.

"Confound the fellow!" he muttered. "I suppose I had better read it, though."

He tore it open and read:

"Miss West has arranged to meet Mr. Hepburn at four o'clock this afternoon."

He read it several times and then scrunched it up angrily in his hands and threw it upon the fire.

"The scoundrel—the low-born outcast," he muttered. "Any decent fellow would have given her up and gone out of the country. I must stop this nonsense. I'm glad Longstaff warned me; good fellow; good fellow."

He returned to his place, rumbling like a volcano about to erupt, and commenced to eat his breakfast. Half-way through Dorothy, pretty and fresh after her night's rest, came in.

"Morning, dad," said she, saluting him with an affectionate kiss, "hope you're not tired after our outing to Ranelagh."

"I'm A1, little lady," said the General, throwing his paper aside. All his irritableness disappeared; it always did when Dorothy made her appearance. "I'm always better for a day in the air. What do you say to a little motor trip this morning?"

He asked the question anxiously. A plan to prevent her meeting with Michael Hepburn had

occurred to him, and he hoped earnestly that she would agree to the proposal. It came to him that it was rather a low-down scheme that he was planning, but his one idea was to save her from this adventurer, as he called him in his heart, and anything was justified if he could do that, he argued.

Dorothy remembered her appointment with Michael.

"I'm afraid——"

"We'll be back to lunch," interrupted the General quickly. "I have an appointment at the club."

Dorothy looked out of the window. The morning was an inviting one for a motor trip—warm, and not a breath of wind. They would be back to lunch. A motor ride would pass the time pleasantly till four o'clock.

"It would be very jolly, dad," said she presently. "But I, too, must be back for lunch."

"Right you are, little girl," said the General. "I will order the car."

Half an hour later they were both seated in the Rolls Royce and travelling at a good speed along the Great North Road towards Finchley.

"We'll soon leave the traffic and dust behind," said the General presently, as they mounted the hill that rises into Barnet town, "and then for the dose of good country air that we're both pining for."

He looked down at Dorothy reclining on the soft cushions at his side.

"I guess there's a certain young gentleman who'll call this morning and be mighty disappointed when he finds you've run off," said he artlessly.

"You mean the hon. Bertie Charters," said Dorothy. "He won't break his heart about it;

besides, I'm going to Ranelagh with him again to-morrow."

She did not like it when her father got on to this subject, and she always did her best to get away from it. She had told him again and again that the hon. Bertie was nothing more to her than a friend, and that if she married at all it would be Michael Hepburn. She had been quite honest about it, but the General would persist in worrying her and poking in the hon. Bertie into all their *tête-à-tête* chats. She found in the end that the best way to quiet the General was to mention that she was going to meet the hon. Bertie. While she was friendly with that individual there was hope, and it generally satisfied him. To-day it was successful, and they fell to talking on other and more pleasant topics.

They passed slowly through Hatfield, and, the town left behind, the General accelerated, and they flew along the even surface at a speed that was exhilarating and refreshing. Stevenage was soon passed, and they steered out on to the plain that lies between the latter place and Royston.

The fields around them were alive with yellow gorse, and the country ahead an undulating golden land stretching into the purple haze that hung in space beyond. Here and there fields of red—red with myriads of poppies—and woods green with foliage broke the monotony of this colour scheme. Dorothy lay back on the cushions and feasted her eyes with the view, and dreamt of Michael and their coming meeting. Suddenly there was a break in the even purring of the engine. Three cylinders only were firing. It brought her back to earth, and she looked anxiously at her father. Before she could

make any remark the others ceased firing too, and the car ran forward on its own impetus.

"Hallo," said the General, applying the brakes. "What's up now?"

He stopped the car and got out. Then he lifted the bonnet and looked within. "The magneto's broken down," he said presently, without looking up. "I've had this trouble before."

"The magneto?" said Dorothy anxiously. "Does that mean that you cannot put it right yourself, dad?"

"It does, little girl."

An awful thought had come to Dorothy. She looked at her watch. It was one o'clock. Would she have time to walk to the nearest station and train back in time to meet Michael by four?

"How far is it back to Stevenage, dad?" she asked, with a tremor in her voice.

"About eight miles."

"Eight miles!" It would take her a good two hours to do that. If only there was a train she might just be in time.

"Dad, I'm going to walk back to Stevenage," said she peremptorily.

"Nonsense, little girl," said the General. "It will be too much for you."

"I'm going to walk," said Dorothy. "I believe this is all a plan to prevent my meeting Michael this afternoon."

The General looked guilty and began tinkering with the engine, afraid to meet her eyes.

"I am sure of it," she continued. "It is very cruel. But I'm going to keep that appointment."

And with that she turned and walked away down the road.

The General watched her go.

" Poor little lady," he muttered. " It's cruel only to be kind. One day you'll thank me for preventing a disaster. You are too good and precious to be thrown away on a rotter like Michael Hepburn."

He filled a pipe and sat down in the car. Then, when he was certain that Dorothy was out of sight, he switched on the current again and drove on slowly towards Royston.

CHAPTER NINE

HINDOO KHAN

THE days that followed that terrible afternoon when Dorothy had failed to keep her appointment and he had learnt of her coming engagement to the hon. Bertie Charters were full of despair for Michael. It seemed to him that Fate had given him the cruellest blow of all, and that there was nothing in life worth living for. He did not doubt that the hon. Bertie spoke the truth. He had known him at school, and knew that unless he had changed greatly he would not play an underhand trick. As for Dorothy, he did not blame her. It was not fair that she should be kept to a promise that was made in the romantic irresponsibility of youth. It was true she had been so insistent that he should not give her up when they met at the dance. But perhaps that was caused by their not having met for so long, and after thinking it over she had changed her mind. It was the right thing to do ; he had no prospects, he had nothing to offer her. As the General had hinted, it was not fair to make his little girl, who had so many opportunities, wait for something that was doubtful, and perhaps might not materialise at all. No, it was as it should be. Only he ought to have been firmer on that night at the General's house ; he should have seen her then for the last time. He had succumbed to her pleading when he should have been strong and ended an engagement that could only bring misery to the woman he loved. It was all for the best really,

and as for him, he must make the best of his life somehow.

Harry Hawkins, from his master's manner, suspected a tragedy, and he tried to amuse him and distract his thoughts in a hundred little ways—efforts that were futile. Something of Michael's despondency descended upon him, too, and he longed for a change. If only his master could leave the country and get a change of occupation he would soon recover, was his thought. This writing work was all very well for chaps who were used to it, but for men of action like his master a nerve-racking business. Secretly he longed for his beloved India again. If only they could begin all over again; if only his master had not been so unfortunate! They were happy days out there. This London was stifling him; it was no place for a soldier like his master and himself. There were moments when the impulse to re-enlist were strong upon him, but he could not bring himself to leave Michael in the lurch.

One day he was returning with a basket full of provisions that he had just purchased, and was about to turn into the stone archway that led into their building, when he was surprised to see a large car drive up and come to a standstill close to him. Wondering, he turned round to watch, as it was most unusual to have motor visitors in Arlington Road. The car was of the most expensive type, with luxurious upholsterings, and he wondered who was the lucky individual who could have such a rich visitor. A chauffeur in immaculate uniform got down from his seat and opened the door. Then a man alighted—a large, massive man dressed in a frock coat, with a large buttonhole and white spats.

And Harry, his eyes travelling slowly from the white spats upwards, got a surprise, for the man's face was black—the face of an English statesman carved in ebony—and he wore a turban wound about his head. The man was an Asiatic and a Mohammadan. But a greater surprise was in store for him, for the visitor came forward and asked in excellent English :

" Do you know if Captain Hepburn lives in this house ? "

Harry was too nonplussed to answer immediately. The whole affair was very puzzling. What could this man want with his master ? He was a complete stranger ; he had never seen him before. And then an idea that perhaps this visitor had come to offer his master employment in India occurred to him, and a great hope entered his heart.

" Yes, sir," said he at last, while the other watched him expectantly. " Yes, sir. I will take you to him at once."

And turning, he went up the stairs so fast that the visitor was unable to keep up with him.

" Glory, sir," cried he, bursting into the room. " Here's a native fellow come to take us to India—and freedom."

Michael looked up from a book he was reading and told himself that his faithful henchman had gone mad.

" A native ! What in heaven's name are you raving about ? "

" A Mohammadan—and he's asking for you, sir."

" A Mohammadan ? "

But the visitor had reached the top story by this time and stood in the doorway.

"The Captain Hepburn Sahib," said he, bowing low after the manner of the East. "Thy servant would speak with thee."

Michael looked at the newcomer with surprise. He did not remember having seen him before. He judged him to be, as Harry had said, a Mohammadan. He noticed that he was powerfully built for one of his race, that his face was intellectual, and that his eyes were very bright. These eyes were fixed upon his now, and he felt uncomfortable. He felt that behind them lay a will that was very strong. Here was a man, he told himself, who would get his own way or die in the attempt.

The stranger read his thoughts.

"The sahib is wondering what I want," he said. "When the sahib's havildar has retired I will speak."

Michael nodded to Harry, and that worthy retired into his own room, and, shutting the door, sat so close to it that some uncharitable person might have said that he was eavesdropping.

"Won't you take a seat?" said Michael when Harry had gone.

The newcomer sat down and again turned eyes upon Michael that seemed to read into his very soul and stir strange feelings within him which he could not describe. He looked away at last, unable to meet his visitor's fixed regard.

"It is many years since we have met," said the newcomer in a soft, musical voice. "The sahib was then a merry little *bawa*, very full of fun."

"I do not remember having seen you before," said Michael, looking up.

"No, the sahib was young—too young to remember. And I have altered since those days.

Allah has been good to me. I am no longer a servant in the English sense, sahib."

"A servant?"

Michael began to understand. His memory travelled back to the time when he was a child in India. He looked at his visitor keenly.

"You don't mean to say that you are Hindoo Khan?" said he presently.

"I am Hindoo Khan, and once I was your servant."

"Hindoo Khan!" cried Michael, all his embarrassment of the man gone. "Why, I still dream of those jolly days we had together. You were very good to me, Hindoo. You were never tired of inventing something to amuse my boyish fancy. I still remember the expeditions, when you carried me about the country on your back; and the fish you caught for me, and the butterflies, and the eggs you risked many a fall to get. I believe I ended up with one of the best collections in India. By jove! you have changed, but I recognize you now."

"Those days have happy memories for me, too," said Hindoo Khan. "I loved your father, the General Sahib. It was a very sad day for me when he died. If he had lived I should still be serving him and living a happy life; instead, I have nothing but worries and cares as the chief adviser to His Royal Highness the Peshwa of Umbarra."

Umbarra? The word jarred on Michael's brain as it fell from the visitor's lips. Umbarra? Where had he heard that word before? Then he remembered the midnight visitor and the curved dagger. This could not have been the man, surely. Why should Hindoo wish to come to his rooms by stealth at

night when he could come a-visiting by day? No, it could not be; yet it was strange.

"When Allah confers greatness upon a man he also confers responsibilities."

"I am glad to hear you have made good, Hindoo," said Michael. "I remember my father saying that your brains were too good to be wasted in service. And he was a judge of men."

"He was a great man, sahib. And the General Sahib's son? How does it prosper with him?"

He glanced quickly round the poor apartment and fixed Michael with those flashing eyes of his.

"Oh, I haven't had the best of luck," said Michael, telling himself that this feeling of embarrassment that possessed him was childish, and making an effort to look the other straight in the face. But he failed, and continued with his eyes on the floor. "I suppose you heard of my court-martial?"

"I have heard, sahib. And the fates have been unkind to you. That is why I am here. I suppose you wish to go back to the East, sahib?"

"No, Hindoo. My mind is quite made up on that score. I shall never set foot in India again."

He rose to his feet, and, getting a pipe from the mantelshelf, began to fill it. His nerves were jangled and out of tune. Why should this fellow upset them otherwise?

"The sahib is mistaken," said Hindoo quietly. "The day will come when he will go back to India."

"You will have to kidnap me then, Hindoo," said Michael with a laugh. "I shall certainly not go of my own free will."

He lit his pipe and inhaled the fragrant smoke.

That would soon set him right, and his embarrassment would pass.

"No, Hindoo," said he, returning to his seat. "Your country has not been exactly kind to me. All my misfortunes commenced in India. Your gods do not love me, Hindoo. I'm beginning to believe in those gods of yours. They've exiled me from your country, and I'm not going to offend them by setting foot in it again."

"Allah is just, sahib. Maybe your bad fortune was to be followed by good fortune. It is the way things run in life. It would be a pity——"

He stopped and turned to the door. A girl had entered and stood on the threshold of the room hesitatingly, as though she waited to be asked to enter. Michael had seen many Indian girls in his time, but he thought this girl was the most beautiful he had ever seen. She was young—about eighteen, he judged. Her face, save that it was dark, reminded him of the sweet face of my Lady Hamilton in that glorious picture of her painted by the great Sir Joshua Reynolds—a picture he had loved from early boyhood. Her hair was a dark golden brown, and was coiled about her head in the English way. She wore a gown of multi-coloured Indian silk that clung to her artistically and did not veil the perfect shape of her figure beneath. But her eyes were the most attractive part of her, so lustrous and melting and full of joy as she looked at him that it seemed to Michael that all the dullness of his room was transformed into sunshine.

He watched her, fascinated, while she stood smiling in the doorway, and then Hindoo broke the silence.

"I thought I told you to wait for me in the car, Jahannarra," said he in Hindustani.

"I wanted to see the captain sahib of whom I have heard so much," said she in English almost as excellent as Hindoo's.

Michael rose to his feet.

"If you will honour my poor rooms by coming in," said he, motioning her to his vacated chair.

She came in at once.

"And does the captain sahib, who is so great a soldier, really live here?" she asked, looking in wonderment about the room. "Oh, this cruel English Government to allow such a thing. In India we would give you a palace."

She looked at Michael wistfully when he nodded a smiling affirmative to her question.

"One day you will come to us," she said, "and we will show you how we treat great men."

Hindoo rose to his feet.

"Yes, Jehan," said he. "One day the captain sahib will come to us. But we must go away now."

He took a card from a gold case and laid it on the table.

"That is where we live, sahib," said he. "If you will honour your servant by coming to dine with him to-morrow night he will be very grateful. Come, Jahannarra."

He turned to the door and the girl followed him. Michael watched them go and was about to pick up the card when the girl came running back.

"Captain sahib," said she in a low voice, "beware of Hindoo Khan. He is a man who gets his way. Do not go to India; danger threatens you there; and do not come to his house to-morrow night."

She laid a hand upon his shoulder as she spoke, and looked at him pleadingly. Michael took the small hand in his and kissed it gallantly.

"Thank you, Jahannarra," said he. "I appreciate your kind thoughts for my safety, but I am not afraid of any man now. There is no one who can injure me more than I have been injured. I am coming to dine with you to-morrow night in the hopes of seeing a very beautiful lady again."

Jahannarra laughed a soft, low musical laugh.

"You speak like all the other Englishmen," said she. "But remember, I have warned you."

And with that she turned and ran from the room.

Michael stood lost in thought for many minutes after she had gone. What could this fellow Hindoo want with him? And why did the man's presence disturb him so? He was still smoking his pipe, but his nerves were still unsettled. A restless feeling was upon him; he felt as though he wanted to get out and run. What harm could Hindoo do him? Why had the girl warned him? A thousand questions presented themselves to him, but he could find no answer.

Then he picked up the card.

Hindoo Khan,
Park Lodge,
Park Lane.

The fellow lived in style then. He must have great wealth behind him. Michael placed the card in his pocket-book.

"I will go to-morrow night," said he. "It ought to be very entertaining."

CHAPTER TEN

THE SCHEMER PLAYS ANOTHER CARD

DOROTHY's feelings for the way Fate had treated her were very bitter. That afternoon when her father had played her so cruel a trick she had arrived footsore and weary at the station of Stevenage to find that the next train to Town did not leave till six o'clock. Arriving at Liverpool Street she hurried to Clarge's to find no Michael waiting for her. Of course, she could not expect him to wait so long. And with the disappointment suddenly came a terrible thought. She did not know where Michael lived. A great feeling of despair seized her. Supposing that she did not see him again? He would not come to the house; she knew his pride too well to hope that he would break the promise given to the General. London was a big place. People might live in it twenty years and never meet. It was very likely that she might never see him again, and she wanted to see him so much. That evening when he had come back to her, after an absence of five years, instinct told her that this was her man, and that she would never love another. Doubts there had been before. His failure, would that alter him? And then people had been talking. All her friends had evil things to say of him, and her father was very bitter too. Yes, there had been doubts. But when he came to her they had all disappeared. He had not changed. It was the same Michael—a man to the core, who, in spite of the greatest disaster that

could occur to anyone, could still say, " I will make good." Yes, instinct told her that this was her man, and she had the courage to stake her all on this feeling that had come to her. It was a great risk perhaps, for the outlook was very black. Few men had suffered as Michael had suffered and come out on top. But then he seemed different from the others, and she had faith in him. And then another thought struck her. Supposing Michael misunderstood the reasons for her non-appearance at Clarge's ? Supposing he took it as a sign that she had changed her mind ? It was a terrible thought, and it worried her. Her father was to blame. She was very bitter against her father. It was the first time in her life that she had quarrelled with him. She knew that he had acted thus because he thought it was for her good. But why did people interfere in matters that they did not understand ? It was the cause of half the misery in the world. Yes, the chances that she would not see Michael again seemed very great. Fate had been very unkind to her, and her outlook on the future very black.

As for the General, he was very pleased with the way his plans had succeeded. He was worried, of course, by the way Dorothy had taken it. He was so accustomed to seeing her bright and gay that it hurt him to see her sad and almost tearful. He was accustomed to hear her singing about the house, and her silence now troubled him. But he argued that it would soon pass, and she would be thanking him for his actions before many months had gone. It was for her good, and he placed that beyond anything in the world. He would sacrifice

wealth, honour, everything, as long as he saved his little girl.

To-day he sat in his study. His desk was close to the large French windows that were open to let in the summer breeze. A pile of letters, with a faded pink ribbon tied loosely about them, lay close to him. And he was copying from one he had taken from the bundle, very carefully and laboriously. Presently he looked up and stared thoughtfully out through the windows. A vista of green trees, and mossy lawns, and patches of brilliant coloured borders, lay before him. The beauty and brightness of it seemed to change the tenour of his thoughts. He lay down his pen and sank back into his chair. "This is hardly playing the game," he mused. "It is not clean. I do not like it. And yet, if I let it go on, my little girl will make a ruin of her life. No, the means to an end is justified."

The door of the room was softly opened and the immaculately dressed Longstaff stood on the threshold.

"Well, what is it now?" said the General snappishly.

"I am sorry to disturb you," said the secretary, "but I have an address for you."

"An address, Longstaff? Not *the* address?"

"The address, sir."

"By Jove, Longstaff, you're a gem. How in heaven's name did you get it?"

And with a bound he leapt from his chair, and snatched the piece of paper that the secretary held out to him.

"I have been making a tour of the post

offices, sir, and I had a lucky shot at West Kensington."

"Splendid, Longstaff. You've brains, and you'll go far."

"I have ambition, sir, and your compliments are very flattering."

"Fifty-four Arlington Road, West Kensington," said the General, reading from the scrap of paper. "This is splendid! I shall want you in about half an hour."

"Very good, sir."

Once more the General turned to his work at the desk. For twenty minutes he worked, and then, folding up the paper he had been writing, he placed it in an envelope and addressed it, still in the careful and laborious manner. That done, he rang the bell. Longstaff came in answer to it.

"Take this, and deliver it to Hepburn personally. Personally mind, Longstaff. It is very important."

"Very good, sir."

And, taking the letter, the secretary left the room.

When he had gone the General returned to the desk, and, tying up the bundle of letters, placed them in a drawer. Then, taking a cigar from a box, and lighting it, he sank into an armchair with a great sigh of relief.

"Thank God, that's finished with!" said he, and once again a smile came into his cold, hard face. "That will complete my work. Once and for all I have put an end to this silly boy and girl romance."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A PAGE FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

MICHAEL had made up his mind to accept Hindoo Khan's invitation to dinner. It was true in the presence of the man he felt uncomfortable and ill at ease, but that would pass, he told himself. He put that down to nerves upset by his love tragedy. Life seemed very blank to him now that Dorothy had gone out of his life. Sitting alone in his rooms was insufferable. He tried to read, he tried to write, but he could not concentrate his thoughts. He seized a hat and walked out into the street. He walked blindly, not caring where he went, his one idea to get diversion from the appalling loneliness that obsessed him. Presently, a little calmer, he found himself walking in the direction of Park Lane. If he could but catch sight of Dorothy at a window and get some explanation from her, was his thought. Soon he was passing the house. He paused on the other side of the road and searched the windows longingly, but no sign of Dorothy. His eyes at last rested on the open windows of a room overlooking the gardens. There he saw the General. It seemed to him that he was looking across at him coldly and sternly. Michael lingered a minute, and passed on. Presently he was conscious of moving amongst a crowd. He had wandered unconsciously into Regent Street. All London had come a-shopping, and all London seemed to him very happy—young girls come to buy the pretty dresses, and furbelows, and ribbons, that

made the greatest shopping way in the world so gay with colour; young men, with pretty women in attendance, come to buy perchance one of those gems that flashed wealth in rays of dazzling light from behind their prison bars of crystal glass. All happy; all laughing. And he, it seemed to him, was the most miserable person in all that world. Why mar so much happiness with his dismal face? He turned, and sought a quieter thoroughfare.

It was seven o'clock when he reached his rooms again. He remembered Hindoo's invitation. Yes, it would be a diversion at any rate. Perhaps it would shake off this despondency that had crept upon him.

He hurried up the stairs. He must dress, and go quickly, or he would be late.

At the door Harry Hawkins was waiting for him

"There's been a gentleman to see you, sir."

"Oh, did he say what he wanted?"

"He wanted to see you personally, sir."

"What sort of a fellow was he, Harry?"

"A little whipper-snapper of a man, sir, very polite, and therefore not to be trusted. 'E wouldn't say what 'e 'ad come for, sir."

"Did he say if he'd call again, Harry?"

"Yes, sir. And 'e's called twice again already. I'm getting quite sick of 'is dandy little face. I 'ate dandies, sir. They sort of get my back up."

"Well, this dandy will have to wait, Harry," said Michael with a laugh. "I'm due out to dinner. Run along, and get my things out, while I have a shave."

If Michael was astonished when he learnt that Hindoo Khan the Mohammadan lived in Park Lane,

he was still more astonished when he reached the house. It was a great rambling building, more of a palace than a house, with large domes, and minarets of coloured glass, after the Romanesque style.

A native opened to him with a low bow—a native dressed in a gorgeous dress of sequins and spangled cloth. Michael found himself in a large pillared hall of creamy marble, above his head a large dome of coloured glass; here and there a small ivory lattice window; and around the hall, which was square, a gallery crowned with cupolas. The light was dim, but he made out two curtains of beads that hid a doorway beyond. The atmosphere within was scented, and he knew at once that it was incense. In a fraction of time, as the native stood aside for him to enter, he stepped from the West into the East.

His conductor closed the door, and bidding him follow in Hindustani Michael was led through the curtain of beads into a small room. Beautiful again this apartment, with walls of veined marble, and pillars festooned with flowers in agate and jasper. But the modern had entered here, for it was furnished with English furniture, and Michael, who at first found it hard to believe that he was not dreaming and back in India, was reassured when his eyes lighted upon the grand piano after Pleyel and the large chesterfields and armchairs covered in the English way with dainty cretonnes. It was incongruous, but he knew his modern civilised East too well to be surprised. He sank into a soft chair while the native went off to announce him.

Left alone, he began to wonder why he had come.

What was this fellow Hindoo Khan to him? Why had he of his own free will run full tilt into companionship, when his one idea after his tragedy was to be alone? Diversion would not cure his sorrow; at least, he thought so now. What a fool he had been to come! It would be a terrible evening; he did not feel in the mood for entertainment. He rose to his feet, as though to run away, and moved towards the door. A laugh behind him made him pause, and, turning, he stood face to face with Jahannarra.

She was dressed in a gown of black silk, so artistically embroidered and beautifully modelled about her pretty figure that it was obviously the work of a master. A rope of pearls of untold value hung around her neck. It was the only jewel she wore. No incongruity here. But for the darkness of her skin she might have been an English beauty dressed for presentation to her King. She came running to Michael with a gay laugh and caught him by the lapel of his coat.

"Oh, you naughty captain sahib," said she. "I believe you want to run away. Are you then afraid of Hindoo? Did I really frighten you when I said he was dangerous? Oh, I am disappointed. I admired you so much in coming in spite of what I said. And now I find that you are really afraid."

She scanned his face with her beautiful eyes, in which was clearly written her disappointment.

Michael took the two small hands from his coat and, bending, kissed them.

"I was really going, Jahannarra," said he. "But not because I was afraid of what you said concerning

Hindoo. I have had big misfortunes, and they have made me want to be alone. It was the thought that perhaps I should have to meet a lot of people to-night that made me wish to get away. Nothing else. But now you have come, Jahannarra, I no longer want to go."

She clapped her hands at this and led him into the room.

"I am so glad, captain sahib," said she. "And I will try and make you forget your great sorrows. You are too young to be sad. One day, I am sure of it, you will be very happy."

She curled herself up upon the divan where Michael had seated himself and sitting tailorwise peered at him with puckered brows.

"They say that I have the prophetic gift in my country," said she thoughtfully. "I do not call it the gift of prophecy but instinct, sahib. I have presentiments, and they are generally right. The other day when I visited you I felt that Hindoo's presence meant harm for you. I think otherwise now."

Michael laughed at her seriousness.

"You look at this moment like a beautiful prophetess," said he. "And why should there be danger for me in the house of Hindoo unless it be the danger of two pretty eyes?"

She laughed gaily at this, and shook a slender finger at him.

"Oh, fie, sahib," said she. "You must not say these things that have no meaning. They are all very well for the mem-sahibs, but we love sincerity in our country."

Michael assured her that he spoke no adulations.

"No, no," said she. "I do not believe you. But to continue. You have broken the thread of my thoughts. Let's see——"

Again the puckered brows and dreamy look in her eyes.

"I thought of you when I left your rooms that day, and the more I thought the more it seemed to me that I had made a mistake. When we met you were oppressed with a dread of something that you could not understand."

Michael winced, and remembered the strange uneasiness he had felt in Hindoo's presence.

"Yes," said he, "and you found——"

"I found that this feeling had come to me, too, and made me nervous that Hindoo meant you harm. But I see differently now."

"What do you see now, O divine prophetess?" said Michael with a laugh.

She did not seem to hear his words, but looked past him as though in a trance.

"I see you in India again, sahib; you wear again the uniform of a soldier. There are many dangers awaiting you—I see them as in a mist, confused and indistinct. They are not to be defined clearly —dangers of shot, and angry crowds, and flashing swords about you. I see you winning a great success at the last. I see you making a name again as a great soldier, and the honour that you have lost returned to you."

Her manner changed as she finished speaking, and, jumping with a gay laugh from the divan, she ran to the table in the centre of the room and took a large box tied with ribbons from it. Then, coming back, she once more curled herself amongst the

cushions, and opening the box commenced to eat the chocolates that it contained.

"Well," said she, looking up presently when Michael still sat lost in thought, "is that not sufficient. Have I not prophesied as you wish?"

"You raise great hopes, Jahannarra," said Michael, coming out of the brown study into which he had fallen. "Once I dreamed great things of myself as a soldier. But those things are not to be. That door is closed to me for ever. If you knew the Indian War Office as I know it, you would have little faith in your prophecies. They could not take me back. I could not expect it. I have committed the unforgivable sin, Jahannarra. I have failed in my duty. I am seeking other work. Writing is to be my career for the future. I am going to write novels. You shall read one of them some day, Jahannarra. Perhaps I will put you in one of them. What do you say to that? The beautiful prophetess who sways a kingdom, and whose prophecies come true in the end."

Jahannarra paused in the operation of placing a large and tempting sweetmeat in her mouth.

"Do you really mean that, sahib?" she asked anxiously.

"Most decidedly. I think you would make a most interesting and lovable character."

She dropped the chocolate back into the box, and, throwing it to one side, came closer to him.

"Tell me just how you would describe me. I am dying to hear. I did not think that you English people liked our countrywomen."

There was a look of pleased expectancy in the

eyes she turned upon Michael, but she was not to receive her answer, for there came a musical tinkling from the curtain of beads, and turning they saw that Hindoo Khan had entered the room.

"This is a great honour, sahib," said he, coming forward with outstretched hand. "My poor house is at your service. What shall it be; a cocktail that you English love?"

He rang a bell and turned to Jahannarra.

"My little Jehan has been entertaining you, sahib?" said he, kissing her tenderly upon the brow. "She is a great treasure, my little Jehan, and a splendid hostess."

"I thoroughly agree, Hindoo," said Michael with a laugh. "I have not had a dull moment since I entered this room. Jahannarra has been reading my future, and has prophesied all sorts of splendid things."

"Ah," said Hindoo, looking fixedly at Michael as though to read his thoughts. "If Jehan has prophesied good, then you are lucky, sahib, for Jehan is generally right."

A native entered with glasses upon a tray.

"Now what is it to be?" asked Hindoo. "I can give you anything within reason that you ask. Sherry and bitters? Very well."

A few words in Hindustani to the native and Michael was offered his drink.

"Chin, chin," said Hindoo in a manner that made Michael laugh, for the man was presenting a new side to him, and all his embarrassment of the meeting in his rooms was gone. "You see, sahib," he added, "I am treating you in the English way although I hail from the East. I am very proud

of your English customs. I have only one regret in life—that I was not born an Englishman."

He sat down between them and took one of Jahannarra's hands in his.

"And my little Jehan, too. I believe she regrets she was not born a mem-sahib. Is it not so, little pearl of the East?"

For a fraction of a second Jehan's eyes rested on Michael, and then she busied herself with the chocolate box.

"I do not know," said she, without looking up. "If my uncle says so, so be it. He has known me all my life, and his perception is unfailing," and then, turning to Michael, "Would the sahib prefer that I was a mem-sahib? Would it be better for the novel that he will write?"

"It would spoil the whole thing," said Michael with a laugh. "No, no, Jahannarra. We will make a beautiful heroine of you as you are."

Jehan turned a pair of merry eyes upon him.

"I am very glad," said she. "And I do not wish to be a mem-sahib."

A great gong boomed somewhere in the house and the bead curtains were swung aside by two natives, who stood with bowed heads waiting for them to pass.

"Another of your English customs," said Hindoo, rising. "Come, take Jehan in, and I will follow."

And so they passed into the dining-room, Jahannarra on Michael's arm and Hindoo walking behind.

Michael found himself in a room of palatial beauty. Around him the whole wall surface was covered with tiny mirrors, thousands of them, and

above his head a ceiling rich with mosaics, emblazoned with blue, and crimson, and gold. He was back in the city of Shah Jehan again, in the glorious Palace of Mirrors. The lighting was screened, but dazzling, and at the farther end of the room a fountain of water played upon the large petals and green foliage of water lilies growing in a great basin of bronze. In the centre of the room a table was set for a meal, and sparkled with silver and golden vases.

"You are wondering, perhaps," said Hindoo, as they took their seats at the table, "why Jehan and I break our castal vows by sitting down with you? When you know us better you will not be surprised. We are too Englishised to worry much about it. Your people have done too much good in the world for Allah to be much offended. A few penances when we get back to India will make our peace. Is it not so, Jehan?"

"Thou hast spoken, O learned one," said Jehan. "Now perhaps thou wilt begin by telling a funny story, as the English do."

She turned eyes so full of merriment and fun upon Michael that he broke into a great laugh, in which Hindoo joined.

The meal was excellent, and the courses were such as might be served at one of the premier restaurants and done them credit. The wines were old and of rare vintage, and Michael, after months of frugal fare, enjoyed himself heartily. Jahannarra kept them merry with her witty tongue, and when the coffee stage was reached and she rose to leave them he felt a pang of disappointment that he must be left alone with Hindoo.

Silence fell between them after she had gone, and the natives, having served coffee and liqueurs, handed them cigars and withdrew. Michael inhaled the fragrant smoke of his costly cigar, and leaning back in his chair waited for Hindoo to speak. The latter sat for a few moments deep in thought, and then suddenly leant forward and looked keenly at Michael.

"I have work for you to do, sahib," said he. "Work that is after your own heart."

"It will take me to India, Hindoo?"

"It will take you to Umbarra, sahib. I loved your father. He was my mother and my father, my brother and my sister. He is dead, alas, and I can no longer serve him, but I can serve his son. I loved you when you were a *bawa*, sahib, and I was your nurse. I am not one to forget. I can mend your fortune, and I am going to do it, sahib."

"And this work, Hindoo?"

"My master, His Royal Highness, Nana Dun, has need of a soldier to train his people. I am to offer you a sum that is equivalent to a thousand pounds a year."

"But why come to me, Hindoo? Surely you could find a man who has been more successful than I. The story of my degradation must be known throughout India. It cannot be a secret to Umbarra."

"They know your story in my country," said Hindoo, "but they will think none the less of you for that. Your fault is but a little matter in their eyes. They remember that before this thing happened you were known as a soldier sahib who would do great things. I have the reputation for

choosing the right men—I owe my success to that—and if I take you back they will welcome you because I have brought you. My word is law in Umbarra. You will come with me, sahib. Your fortune lies before you. I have great faith in you."

There was no pleading in his tone. He spoke rather with the conviction that he would obtain what he wanted. Michael at first felt inclined to laugh at the man's cocksuredness, but Hindoo's eyes were fixed upon his now, and the old feeling of apprehension of he knew not what came to him.

"No, Hindoo," said he, turning his eyes away. "I thank you for your offer, but I cannot accept. I have made up my mind never to set foot in India again, and I am not one to chop and change."

"You English are a strange race," said Hindoo, rising. "I offer you a fortune when you are poor, and you cast it aside because you have taken a dislike to my country. But I tell you this—you will come to India. I have a presentiment, and they generally come true. I am driving down to Southampton to-morrow. The car will be waiting outside this house at ten o'clock. The captain sahib and his havildar will come to me then, and we will drive down together."

"You will be disappointed, Hindoo," said Michael, but his tone lacked conviction, as though Hindoo's assurance had disconcerted him.

"I have spoken, sahib. Come, Jehan is waiting for us."

Hindoo rose to his feet, and native servants flung wide the curtains. The sound of a piano being played *sotto voce* floated out to them, and then the words of Kipling's famous Mandalay sung in a low,

sweet voice. The words seemed like a message to Michael as they fell clear and bell-like upon his ear :

If you 'ear the East a-calling
You won't never 'eed naught else.
No, you won't 'eed nothin' else
But them spicy garlic smells,
An' the sunshine, and the palm trees,
An' the tinkly temple bells.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE LETTER

THE clocks were striking the hour of twelve when Michael left the house in Park Lane. He carried away with him the memory of a very enjoyable evening. Jehan's merry laughter and sweet voice still rang in his ears. She was very fascinating and very pretty, this child of the East. And as for Hindoo, he was very amusing with his "But I tell you this—you *will* come to India," and "I have spoken." Go to India? He would see him damned first. His old elation had come to him again. He felt as though he would yet make good. There was his book with Mapperly & Thrubb, and Dorothy—he could not lose her; there must be some misunderstanding that would right itself.

He mounted the stone steps that led to his rooms with buoyant steps, and entered his apartments whistling. Harry Hawkins, on his knees in the centre of the room with a portmanteau before him, looked up in surprise to see his master's change of spirit.

"Glad to see you've enjoyed yourself, sir," said he, carefully folding a pair of slacks.

"And what in heaven's name do you think you're doing at this time of night?" queried Michael, shutting the door behind him.

"A little packing, sir."

"A little packing? What in the wide world for?"

"Thought you might be going a journey, sir. You

never know, and I ain't one to be caught napping, sir."

"I suppose that fellow, Hindoo, has been talking to you, eh?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, sir," said Harry, "Mr. Khan did suggest something about taking us to India. He's a grand fellow, sir. Pots of money. He would make your fortune."

"I would rather make my own fortune, thank you, Harry," said Michael. "So you can take that bag in the other room and unpack."

"The East is a grand place," said Harry, with a ring of disappointment in his voice. "It's real life out there, with its eternal sunshine and gay colours. I'm longing for a sniff of the mimosa again, sir, and those lazy siestas under the deodars. I'd risk ten days' cells to have a peep at those old wooden bridges by the Ganges, with their gay shops and booths and the treasures that they sell almost for nothing, sir. And then the 'ills, sir. The glory of 'em, and the grandeur. Wouldn't you like to be once again in one of them little toy trains that puff you up to 'eaven in the clouds?"

"A splendid dissertation on the East, Harry," said Michael, laughing in spite of himself. "You would make a fortune writing for the guide books. Unfortunately I find myself of the same persuasion still. We are not going to India."

Harry Hawkins turned away to hide the disappointment in his face.

"Well, of course, sir, if you say so it will be so. But I 'ad great 'opes. By the way, sir, the little dandy fellow's been a-popping in and out regularly every 'alf-hour since you've been gone. Just like

the cuckoo in a Swiss clock. Must want to see you mightily important, I'm thinking. Why, blest if that ain't 'im again."

He walked to the door, and, opening it, disclosed the immaculately dressed form of the General's secretary.

"Ah, Longstaff," said Michael, rising, "I hear you have been looking for me. What can I do for you?"

The General's secretary entered the room and held forth a letter.

"I was asked to deliver this. It is important, I believe."

Michael took the letter, and a glance told him that it was from Dorothy. A great joy filled his heart. Here was the explanation that he so eagerly awaited.

"Come in for a few seconds, Longstaff," said he, with a ring of pleasure in his voice. "The night is young for midnight-oil-burners like you and me."

"I'm sorry," said Longstaff, retreating to the door, "but I have still some work to do which will keep me till two o'clock. Good-night."

And he was gone. Harry Hawkins had retired discreetly too, with his portmanteau and pile of clothes, and Michael was left alone. He glanced several times lovingly at the letter and then opened it.

This is what he read:

"My Dear Michael,—I am afraid this letter will be the source of some pain to you, but I feel that I am doing the right thing in writing it. After our meeting the other night I have thought a great deal, and I have come to the conclusion

that it is better for us to part. We were very young before you went to India, and young people, in matters of love especially, often make mistakes, don't they? A girl of seventeen is sometimes inclined to be romantic and not very practical. With her love and a cottage is often looked on as a jolly affair, and not as the practical person would look on it—an adventure of hardship to be thought of with trembling. You know, as well as I, that some thought must be given to the future. It is only in a novel that one can live on bread and kisses. You say that you will only claim me when you have a position to offer me, but, Michael, I cannot wait. There is someone who wants me very badly, and I must soon give him an answer. At present I have not quite made up my mind, but I think I shall have to accept him in the long run. I am sorry if this truthfulness causes you pain, but I am sure of all things you would have me tell you the truth, and not hide things. One day when you meet the right girl you will be grateful for this release and thank your stars that things happened as they did. Good-bye, and the best of luck.

"Yours sincerely,

"DOROTHY WEST."

The letter fell from Michael's hand and a black mist rose before his eyes. He had expected to read a different letter; this was so unexpected. He felt that everything good in life was gone. The one thing that had helped him bear up in his misfortune was the thought that Dorothy was still left. Now all was hopeless; a vista of long, dark days of misery

opened out before him. What was the use of work —of success, of anything—when the one thing he wanted most in all the world could never be obtained? He read the letter again, and the words seemed blurred and misty, but there was no mistaking its meaning. He was dismissed for all time, and the light of his life had gone out. "There is someone who wants me very badly, and I must soon give him an answer." The words sang in his brain and made him pace about his room as one distracted. A great anger was in his heart against the hon. Bertie and his good fortune. Why should some people be born to gain all, and others to lose all worth having in life? Fate was very cruel to him. With Dorothy he would have carried on. Life would have been a joy to him. Without——

He found himself back at his desk again, and taking the letter he read it again and again till his eyes became weary. Then he lay back in his chair, and the happy times before he left for India came back into his mind. He lived again those happy days with Dorothy in her father's home upon the banks of the Thames—those happy days never to be renewed. He saw his merry companion again, laughing and happy, heard her dreams of their future together as she spoke them to him in the snuggery amongst the trees. He had believed her, and now——

He rose once more and paced his room as one demented. It was very cruel, he told himself, and what was to become of him? He could not stay in England; he must get away, else he would go mad. Write? He would never feel capable of putting pen to paper again. Action, to distract

his thoughts, he must have, but how to get it? And while he paced backwards and forwards another scene presented itself to him—an Eastern room lit with a myriad lights and a pretty girl seated by a piano singing, and the words of her song still rang in his ears:

> I hear the East a-calling . . .
> Oh, it's there that I would be . . .
> By the old Moulmein Pagoda . . .
> Looking lazy at the sea.

A message calling him, surely.

And then he remembered Hindoo's words, "I drive down to Southampton to-morrow."

That way lay freedom. It was the only thing left. It was an adventure which at any rate would take him away from the scene of his greatest sorrow.

There was a faint sound of movement in Harry's apartment.

"Hallo, Harry," cried Michael. "Gone to bed yet?"

"Not yet, sir."

"What are you doing?"

"Unpacking a few things, sir."

"Then you can pack them again, Harry—everything I've got."

"Very good, sir. Then you're going after all?"

"Yes, we sail for India in the morning."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE PLANS OF MICE AND MEN GANG OFT AGLEY

When everybody round about you doubts, and their doubts are fired at you on every conceivable occasion, you must be very strong-minded not to end by doubting too in the end. The opinion of the world is hard to gainsay, and only the very few hold out, and remain of the same opinion still. On every side Dorothy heard hard opinions of Michael Hepburn. Her friends had nothing good to say of him, and as for her father, the General, he railed against him all day long, but in a manner that completely veiled any feelings of personal enmity. For a long time she held out, and most hours of the day she was at her window on the look-out for Michael to pass the house. Why did he not come? He knew that she had not got his address. He must suspect surely that she had been prevented from keeping the appointment. So she waited patiently for him to come for the explanation. But when the days dragged by and he did not put in an appearance she began to think. Had he, after all, decided to put the heroics he had preached to her at the dance into practice? Had he decided that it was for her good that he should go away? She knew Michael, and she began to fear. Oh, if he only knew how she loved him, and that nothing else mattered. Day after day passed and no Michael. She began to despair, and in the end the feeling that he had run away from her became very strong, and she felt very unhappy. Another thing that worried her was

the way everybody urged her to marry the hon. Bertie Charters. From every side, almost every minute of the day, the match was being urged as an excellent one. Under such a bombast most girls would have succumbed very readily. A man who would one day be a duke and the owner of vast riches, and who was besides good looking and very pleasant company, could not be thrown over lightly. With Michael there Dorothy would have had nothing to fear; she would have said "No" with a light heart. But with Michael gone, perhaps never to return, it was a different matter. She began to fear. It was not that she disliked the hon. Bertie. It would have been different then. But they had been playmates from almost as far back as she could remember, and she liked him exceedingly. The time was coming—she scented it with a woman's instinct—when he would ask her to be his wife. What would be her answer? She dared not think. In the end she felt that she would accept him and put an end to all this bantering and advice that was being showered upon her till she was heartily sick of it all.

And meanwhile the hon. Bertie was very pleased with life. He felt the time had come to ask the woman he loved to be his wife, and he did not doubt her answer. Life which had been so aimlessly passed would at length have an interest, and he looked forward to days of eternal joy. Money, which up to now he had looked on as a bore, would be a delight. It should buy everything his lady desired. The shops that he had passed by with a feeling of *ennui* would now be a source of pleasure. He would take her into every house in Bond Street, and buy

up their treasures lock, stock, and barrel if she so desired. His palace at Parkmere, with its hundred rooms, filled with old and priceless gems of furniture, and its famous Italian gardens, unrivalled for their beauty, should no longer be a house of silence with drawn blinds. He pictured it filled with her friends, radiating with life and laughter. And as these thoughts came to him he went about as one inspired. He was too happy, perhaps, to notice that Dorothy was not her bright self. She was gay in his company, but it was dissimulation; she did not at present wish him to know of her unhappiness. Perhaps one with a little more discernment might have noticed something amiss, but the hon. Bertie remained in happy ignorance, and he looked about him for a time to say his say. Several times he was on the point of speaking, but somehow an intuition told him that the time was not yet ripe, and so he pocketed his impatience and bided his time. And while he waited, he thought out new manœuvres, for it was essential to him that the final act should be enacted in romantic surroundings. The great idea of the arbour of roses had been an awful failure. He had manœuvred Dorothy into one at Ranelagh, it is true, most skilfully, but when he was about to speak a pair of giggling schoolgirls, with pronounced and loud Cockney accents, sat down a few yards away, and commenced to cackle. The romantic cord was snapped. How could one say sacred things with farce playing riot in the coppice? He gave it up after twenty minutes' agony, and retired with the schoolgirls' giggles still ringing in his ears. He swore perdition on the unromantic nature of youth, that must bring its silly sniggling into the sacred

shrine of arbours of roses and eglantine. How he eventually summoned up enough courage to speak the desire of his heart I am about to relate. It happened in this wise. One afternoon he motored the General down to Henley. It was one of those afternoons in the summer when the sun is blazing hot, and the breeze has not the strength to move the lightest ball of thistledown. From the balcony of Leander the river looked cool and inviting, so, when tea was finished, the hon. Bertie, as though the thought had just occurred to him, and was the inspiration of the moment, and not the dark intriguing that it really was, suggested that they should take a punt and while away an hour or two upon the river's refreshing surface. The General, who was very comfortably ensconced in a chair with all the latest papers by his side, pleaded *anno domini*, and winked at the hon. Bertie when the latter hypocritically suggested that " It was a pity to froust in a chair on such an afternoon." And so it fell out that the unsuspecting Dorothy found herself alone in a punt upon the cool waters of Father Thames with a designing bachelor.

For some time the hon. Bertie manœuvred the punt down-stream, while he talked common inanities. And then suddenly, with a clever turn of the pole, he guided the craft into a silvern nook by the bank that screened them effectively from view. And even as Dorothy ducked to escape the low-lying branches of a willow her woman's instinct told her that she was face to face with her destiny, and must make the decision of her life.

The hon. Bertie moored the punt by means of fixing a chain round the gnarled trunk of a tree,

and to prevent it swinging round in the current he jammed the pole deep in the mud on the water side. Then he lit a cigarette, and in a manner that was surprisingly calm said :

" These river nooks are delightful places for *tête-à-têtes*."

" By the trouble you've taken to secure the punt it looks as though you wished to bivouac here," said Dorothy with a laugh.

" There's no hurry," said the hon. Bertie. " This is a delightful spot. Dinner is at seven, and I'll have you back on the stroke."

" Very well," said Dorothy, and resigned herself. And while the minutes fleeted by, and the hon. Bertie passed them by talking commonplace observations, Dorothy fell to wondering what would be the manner of his proposal and what would be her answer.

Presently the hon. Bertie threw a half-smoked cigarette into the water, and turned to her.

" Dorothy," said he. " We've known each other a long time. You are well enough acquainted with my character to know that I would make you a good husband. I love you and want you badly. What have you to say ? "

So direct was the attack, and different from what she had expected, that Dorothy, as though relieved of a great tension, burst out laughing. But, seeing the look of pain in the other's eyes, she said :

" Oh, I am very sorry—I did not mean—I——" and she floundered miserably.

" I am not joking," said the hon. Bertie. " I am in dead earnest. Don't make me miserable, little girl."

And he came closer and took one of her hands in his.

If Dorothy had had any doubts before, now that she was face to face with her destiny, her way seemed clear.

"No, Bertie," said she, drawing away. "We have been good pals, and I want that to last always. But I can never be any more to you than a friend."

To the hon. Bertie, who had been so sure of himself, this appeared nothing more than a woman's waywardness, and he expected to gain his answer in the end.

"I can give you everything your heart desires," said he. "All my fortune I lay at your feet. Just think what a jolly time we can have together, you and I."

And when she remained silent:

"Everybody expects it—you will make the dearest little wife in the world."

"No, Bertie," said Dorothy at last. "I am sorry, but I can never be your wife. I will be frank with you. I am in love with someone else."

"Someone else? But there is no one who has been near you, Dorothy. All the others have given me a clear field for months. Someone else . . it can't be!"

"I love Michael Hepburn."

"Michael Hepburn? My God!"

The exclamation, and her companion's seeming horror, startled Dorothy. She had not meant to make a confidant of the hon. Bertie—the confession had slipped out unconsciously—and now she feared that she had acted foolishly. He, too, would condemn her as the rest had done for sacrificing

herself to a man who had been a failure. She turned to her companion pleadingly.

" Do not condemn me," said she. " If you knew Michael as I know him you would have faith in him."

But the hon. Bertie sat as one struck down, muttering the words " Michael Hepburn." Presently he looked up.

" How long has this been going on? " he asked.

And then Dorothy told him the whole story. It did not seem strange to her that she should choose this man as her confidant. Some inspiration told her that it would be for the best. And when she had finished the hon. Bertie said :

" And you have not seen him for weeks? "

" No, I am afraid that his pride is offended by my not keeping the appointment."

" No, it is not Dorothy. I am to blame."

" You ! "

" Yes. Listen. I am an unmitigated ass. I have been too cocksure of myself. I looked upon our union as a certainty. About a fortnight ago I met Michael, and I told him that we were going to get married. You see, I was so dead sure. And it must have been that which sent him away."

" Oh, Bertie ! "

" You do not know how sorry I am, Dorothy. If I had only known I would have helped you. Instead, I have sent him away."

" I do not think it was that."

" I am sure of it. And when he finds out, he will think me a cad of cads. I have sent him away with a lie. I may be an aimless fool, who has not a single charitable action marked up against him in the Book

of Books, but I am not a cad, Dorothy. I shall put this right."

"But how?"

"It shall be my one task in life to find him and explain. If I have to spend my last farthing I will seek him out and bring him back to you. I am frightfully sorry this has happened, and my one desire in life will be to remedy matters."

His manner was deadly earnest, and Dorothy felt her heart fill with joy. She knew the hon. Bertie, and trusted him. He would do as he said. It was the greatest piece of luck in the world that she had listened to the consciousness within her that had prompted a confession when she had meant to be silent. It was a happy ending to the encounter that she had feared so much, and she felt like bursting into song, so happy she felt. Instead, she turned to the hon. Bertie and kissed him.

"I am sure you will do what you say, Bertie," said she. "You are the best friend in all the world, and I shall always remember your kindness to me."

"You must thank me when I have succeeded," said the hon. Bertie. "Until then I deserve kicks, not kisses."

And, unmooring the punt, he set its head towards the Leander Club and worked his way back in silence, and there came to him the thought that this was a sorry ending to all his dreams. And like the melancholy Dane he felt:

> The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,
> That I was ever born to set it right.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE GIRL IN THE RED TOQUE

THERE are some people who walk aimlessly through life until some happening of moment stirs them into action. Love, or the loss of someone loved, fortune dwindled away, or starvation knocking at the door, have been known to turn the idler into a useful member of society. Whether the loss of Dorothy would have that effect upon the hon. Bertie Charters remained to be seen. At any rate, he had turned into a new being. His major-domo, Cyril Valentine, was utterly confounded. The first shock he received was when his master rose at the unearthly hour of eight, when his customary hour had been eleven, and, calling for pen and paper, had written eleven letters. Eleven letters ! Why, he did not remember him writing that amount in the course of a whole year, and to write so many between getting out of bed and breakfast was a fact that was unusually startling. Then, again, those long excursions of his which were undertaken on foot, and brought him back dead weary at night. To walk when he had half a dozen cars in his garage was the action of one whose metamorphosis is beyond the ken of even a major-domo. Another thing that upset the wondering Cyril Valentine was the amount of visitors that commenced to call at the house in Jermyn Street. And such visitors, too ; mostly of that class that he facetiously termed " human scarecrows "—humans who were only seen in the dark places, except when some exceptional task lured them into the lights of

Piccadilly. Men with dirty patched clothing, and unwashed faces, and breath fetid with the fumes of rank gin and whisky. And here was his master, a lover of cleanliness, actually closeted with them alone. What did it all mean? Why these secret comings and goings? What good in all the world could this scum do for his master? It was mystifying. He began to fear that his master was taking leave of his senses.

What his subsequent actions would have been—whether he would have consulted a doctor on his master's behalf, or whether he would have visited the duke and risked his future livelihood by a confession—remains in conjecture, for he was saved all this by the hon. Bertie taking him into his confidence.

"I expect you're wondering at these goings on, Valentine," said he one day after an individual more repellent than the others had been shown out. "A bit mystifying, eh?"

"Well, sir," said the major-domo truthfully, "they 'ave set me wondering, so to speak."

"They're my sleuth-hounds, Valentine."

"Sleuth-'ounds, sir?"

"Yes, Valentine. I'm searching London for a man who has disappeared. I put advertisements in every paper for a fortnight asking for news of him, but I did not get a single reply. So I followed it up by another asking for men out of employment to apply here for a job. When they come I send them out like so many amateur Sherlock Holmes to search for my man."

"And if I might speak confidentially, sir," said the major-domo, "you're not likely to get much

'elp from that sort. They spend your money in the public 'ouses, sir, and don't stir a step to go 'unting for your man."

"You think that, Valentine?"

"I'm sure of it, sir. I know them sort."

"But there's a reward to earn."

"The few shillings you've given will be reward enough for that class. And if they want more they'll grasp at something substantial, and come round for your silver one of these nights, sir."

"So you think I'm on a fool's errand, Valentine? Don't be afraid to speak out."

"Well, sir, speaking as man to man and not as servant to master, I think you're wasting your time."

"Well, what do you suggest?"

"Carry on with the advertisements, sir. It's the surest way."

"Umph!" said the hon. Bertie. "I'll think about it. Meantime don't let any more of these people in. Give them half a crown, and send them away. Poor devils! I did not think until the last fortnight that there were creatures so abject and low walking about the earth. We live and learn, Valentine."

"That is so, sir. There are 'more things in 'eaven and earth, 'Oratio,' as the play says."

"Well done, Valentine. I see you patronise the drama. Now don't forget my orders. No more of these people. I only want to see those who actually know where I can find Mr. Hepburn."

And the hon. Bertie turned to his desk and began to inspect the pile of letters neatly arranged in front of him. He found advertisements neatly disguised as letters so that they should be opened,

begging epistles by the score, invitations to the houses of the select, and he threw them to one side impatiently as one who has had a surfeit of such things. An envelope near the bottom of the pile caught his eye, and he lifted it out with a cry of pleasure. It was from Dorothy—a short note asking him for news. Had he had any luck with his search? What new schemes had he thought out? When was he coming to see her? And she signed herself, "Always your pal, Dorothy."

It sent his mind back to the scene on the river again, to the day when he had lost the desire of his heart, and discovered that he had sent a friend away by telling him a lie. It was a strange thing that the thing that rankled most was not that he had lost Dorothy, but that he had acted like a cad to a friend. It worried him considerably, and he made a vow in his heart that he would find him, come what may.

So far he had had no luck. He had hunted up all the men who might know something of Michael Hepburn—men who had been to school with him, or Army men back from India—but with no avail. Then he had inserted advertisements in the papers offering large rewards of money for anybody bringing news of his man. That, too, had proved abortive. His last desperate effort of solving the unemployment question by turning those out of work into detectives had also been an absolute failure. What was he to do? He began to fear that his man had disappeared off the face of the earth. Perhaps he had committed suicide. He did not think that Michael was that sort of man, but still, in the face of all these failures, it seemed

more than probable. The thought made him uneasy. His one desire was to tell Michael that he had lied to him, and to ask his apology. If his man was still in the land of the living what could he do to get into communication? His ingenuity of ideas had run dry. He must continue with the advertisements, as his major-domo suggested. It was the only way.

And so, day by day, an advertisement offering a large reward for news of Michael Hepburn appeared in all the papers, but the weeks passed and he received no answer. He saw a good deal of Dorothy. She was depressed, too, at his failure. She talked of doing something, as the strain of waiting was getting unbearable—a suggestion that he met with horror. What, earn her own living, when she had been used to all the luxuries of the land? Why, the thought was preposterous. And he preached her a long homily which was built up round iterations of "Why, it will end in rough hands," and "You don't know the hardships that girls of that class have to face." "No," he told her, "you must put your trust in me; something's bound to turn up presently." But the days passed and his advertisements had brought no news of Michael Hepburn.

One afternoon he was sitting in his study, trying to pick up the threads of a book that he had laid aside many times impatiently, when he heard the now very common altercation at the doorway between his major-domo and a caller in answer to his advertisements.

"So you've come about Mr. Hepburn? Well, do you know where 'e is?"

"No, I am afraid I do not."

The answer was in a girl's voice, and there was a sweetness in it that made the hon. Bertie drop his book and listen with interest.

"Well, then," said the voice of the major-domo, "I'm afraid it's no good, miss. The master's tired of seeing people who thinks they know where to find 'im."

"Oh, well, I'm sorry to have troubled you. It would have been jolly to have been of help to you. I love a mystery, and might have learnt the secret of those strange advertisements that appear in the papers so frequently. Woman's eternal curiosity, I suppose. Your master must be a very determined young man, Mr. Dry-as-dust. Good-bye."

A gay laugh, and the patter of her footsteps on the flagellated pavement without as she made her departure, floated into the study.

In a moment the hon. Bertie was at the window. He saw his visitor passing down the footway. She was small, and her figure was well shaped and dainty. She was entirely clothed in black except for a prettily shaped red toque and red veil to match. It was a colour scheme that pleased the hon. Bertie. At the gate he saw her turn and smile up at the house, as though she were pleased with her parting shot at the major-domo. The hon. Bertie could imagine Cyril Valentine's face, as immobile as a sphinx, when he received it—enough to make any girl try to unfreeze it with an impertinent remark. He noticed, too, that it was a pretty face, and he imagined that the owner was bright and full of fun. And even as he watched her it came to him that he would like to question this girl; she might have some clue at

any rate that would be of help. He turned and, summoning his valet, sent him running after the visitor.

"I am very annoyed, Valentine. You do not use your discretion. She might have had some useful information to impart. Go, and bring her back, or it will go ill with you."

And the major-domo, whose pet abomination was haste of any description, actually left the house running, to return in a few minutes all out of breath and dishevelled. But he had saved the dreaded wigging, for he brought the girl in the red toque with him.

"I'm awfully sorry my man was so rude," said the hon. Bertie as she was shown into his sanctum. "He really has no discrimination. I shall be getting rid of him one of these days."

"Oh! he was really quite amusing," said the girl. "I'm afraid that it was I who was rude. I couldn't help it. I am so used to writing dialogue that I am afraid the spirit of it enters into my conversation sometimes unintentionally."

"So you are a writer?"

"Yes, I scribble a bit."

"You must be very clever. And you have published your works?"

"Not yet. I have not had any luck yet. But I'm full of determination, and everything comes to those who wait."

There was a touch of sadness in her voice, as the platitude was spoken, that made the hon. Bertie look closer at his visitor. He noticed that her clothes, though carefully kept, were beginning to show signs of age. And he thought that her face

was lacking in the colour that it should hold, and was perhaps a little pinched with self-denial. Here was one, he told himself, who had learnt the hard lesson of doing without, and faced life's hardships with a smiling face.

"Well," said he presently, "what have you to tell me of Michael Hepburn?"

"I am afraid very little. I can tell you where he lived, that is all. I am afraid your bird has flown. He has been gone some time."

"Where he lived!" cried the hon. Bertie. "Why, that is what I have been trying to find out for the last two months. And where did he live?"

She told him the address.

"I found it out by accident," she said. "I have a tiny niece living with me. One day she got lost, and it was your friend who took her to his house, and stopped her howls by tempting her with dainty cakes, and playing the Good Samaritan generally. Then, extracting her address, he brought her home. For a long time I have had to take her to the house once a week, as a weekly treat, so that she might look upon the place where she had spent such a glorious afternoon. I have often thought of coming to you, but I did not pluck up courage enough till this afternoon."

"You have done me a very great service," said the hon. Bertie, and, taking a cheque book, he wrote a draft for a thousand pounds and handed it across.

He saw a look of ecstasy come into the face of his pretty visitor while she handled it with trembling fingers.

"But I really can't take this," said she, looking

at the giver doubtfully. "I haven't done anything to earn it."

"You have more than earned it," said the hon. Bertie with emphasis.

A fear had come to him that she would hand the cheque back, and that the expression of joy in her face, which was good to see, would disappear.

"I am a rich man, and could give you a thousand cheques like that without missing the money. You have done me a great service, and my only regret is that I did not offer more."

It took a lot of persuasion to make her accept the cheque, but eventually the hon. Bertie succeeded, and saw her trip off as light as a fairy, and with the look in her eyes of one whose cornucopia is flowing to the brim. And, having watched her go, he called for his hat and stick and set out on his own adventure.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE DISPENSER OF SWEETMEATS

The hon. Bertie Charters found the rooms in Arlington Street vacant, with a notice that they were to let pinned upon the panels of the door. Inquiries were to be made opposite. So he knocked upon the little iron knocker and waited. The door was opened presently by a very old man with blue spectacles. He held a pen in a hand which was stained with ink, and was obviously a scribbler of sorts.

The gentleman had come with a commission? His charges were a shilling a hundred envelopes. No, not that? in a tone of evident disappointment. What then? No! he did not know where the late tenant had gone. Yes, he should have the key but living was so hard to get, and he was sorry the gentleman had not come with a commission.

The hon. Bertie took the key and felt sorry that age should carry so hard a burden.

"Copy out to-day's front page of the *Daily Mail*," said he. "Here's two pounds. I'll cal for it to-morrow."

He fled, and entered the apartments of the rooms to let. They were very dirty, and the atmosphere was thick with dust. He opened a window so that he might breathe more freely, and made a search. There was little to find—a few pieces of manuscript, scattered here and there about the floor, but no clue as to where the late owner had betaken himself. In the inner room he saw a few old tins lying about,

and a few empty beer bottles standing in a corner. Nothing here either. His man had gone and left no trace of his destination. A few pieces of paper lay about the floor. He picked them up and examined them severally. They were mostly cuttings from newspapers—jokes from the colour press, descriptions of military reviews—and a few slips with calculations of household expenditures. One in particular attracted his attention. It contained the following hieroglyphics:

Owing to Mrs. Huggins.

Won pakit Woodbynes—penny.
Won ounse shagg—four and an 'alf.
Two punds torfee for the kidd—one shilling and 'alf.
Total, one and five.

It came from an illiterate source, but the penman was honest, else why trouble to categorise debts if they were not to be paid? Who was this Mrs. Huggins? She must live in the neighbourhood, and owned some shop where Michael's servant was allowed tick. It was doubtful if this good lady would know where the bird had flown to, but it was worth investigating. Any clue was worth following in the present desperate state of affairs.

He pocketed the slip, and, returning the key, set out on his new adventure. It appeared that Mrs. Huggins was a well-known character in the neighbourhood, and he found her place of domicile easily. It was a small shop in a mean little street. The good lady was a dispenser of sweetmeats—the kinds more noted for their gaudy colours perhaps

than the allurements of their taste. They were arranged in neat glass bottles, and boxes of different sizes, behind a rampart of dirty window pane, and a crowd of ragged children stood and peered longingly at them outside, no doubt dreaming of Saturday and the weekly penny. Here and there among the boxes were arranged rows of yellow coloured packets of cigarettes and tobacco. A notice above the doorway proclaimed that the owner had a licence to sell the same.

The hon. Bertie entered the shop. Mrs. Huggins was busily serving a half a dozen of customers—children come to buy a pennyworth of heaven. She looked up as he entered, and he read distrust in her look. He regretted then that he had not put on an old suit, and made himself more in fitting with his surroundings. "Well," said she with arms akimbo, when the last of her customers had been served, "what can I do for you?"

The hon. Bertie handed her the piece of paper with the hieroglyphics. "Has that been paid?" he asked.

She took it, glanced at the figures upside down, and handed it back.

"Can't read, young man. 'As what been paid?"

"Did the late tenant of 54 Arlington Road go away owing you anything, Mrs. Huggins?" said the hon. Bertie, feeling that he was muddling things somehow.

"No, he did not"—with emphasis. "There weren't no honester person living than that gentleman. Go away without paying indeed!"

And the good lady bristled till the hon. Bertie felt that she meant personal violence to him.

'I suppose, Mrs. Huggins," said he, in his most persuasive style, "the gentleman did not hint at all where he was going to? He did not leave any address behind him?"

"No, 'e didn't, and if 'e 'ad I shouldn't tell you. I mind me own business, and don't poke me nose into business that don't concern me, like some busybodies." This with a sniff.

The hon. Bertie began to despair.

"By the way, there's a reward of a thousand pounds offered for the information, Mrs. Huggins."

"Well, you can keep your reward, young man. I don't know nothing, and you're wasting my time."

And she turned and, entering her little room, slammed the door. The hon. Bertie felt that he had failed. A suspicion came to him that the good lady of the sweetshop might know something, but that she was averse to impart it to one whom she considered an impostor. And then an idea came to him. He would at least try again. And, going to the door, he called the sweetmeat worshippers from before their window shrine, and bade them make their dreams realities by ordering what they wished. And as the mites toddled off with pockets bulging—with quantities more than their most avaricious yearnings—and as the good mistress of the children's Eldorado made out her score, with the help of pencil and paper and much mental strain, the hon. Bertie ventured once again.

"Of course I have nothing against the tenant of fifty-four. In fact, it is to his advantage that I search for him. It is to give him something that he values."

"Oh," said Mrs. Huggins. "I thought as may be he owed you a trifle."

And, her heart warmed by his generosity perhaps, she said:

"I think perhaps my boy could help you." And she started calling "Johnny, Johnny" very loudly.

A small boy with large red cheeks and a shaggy head of auburn hair came peeping in from the inner room, and, catching sight of the hon. Bertie, jerked back again shyly.

"Come you 'ere, Johnny, at once, and don't be silly," said the lady of the shop. "'E won't eat yer."

And the boy returned slowly, and stood looking awkwardly up at the well-dressed visitor. A sovereign pressed into his hand unloosed his tongue like magic, and a stream of immaterial chatter issued forth.

"'E was a sodger—a grand man—'e told me all about the wars. I'm going to the wars when I grow up. Five niggers 'e killed with is own 'and. It were fine!"

"That's very interesting, Johnny," said the hon. Bertie, guiding him back to lines material. "But where has this soldier gone?"

"Dono. 'Spect 'e's gone with the nigger chap."

"Nigger chap? Tell me about him, Johnny."

"Said as 'ow 'e might find 'im and 'is master a job. A fine big black man 'e were, with a real gold watch-chain. Took me round to see 'is 'ouse, 'e did. Fine place; like a blooming palace."

"Oh," said the hon. Bertie, his interest aroused. "And could you show me this house if I gave you another pound, Johnny?"

"Bechyer life I could."

"Then fire away, Johnny, and earn it. And, Mrs. Huggins, if this helps me to find the man I'm hunting for I shall have much pleasure in sending you a cheque for a thousand pounds."

And, having delivered this bombshell, he followed the boy with the curly hair and was led to Hindoo Khan's palatial residence in Park Lane.

There he dismissed the boy, first having made quite sure by questioning that this was indeed the house where the black gentleman lived. Then, with the name of the house, and the number, entered in a pocket book, he returned home, determined to make inquiries about the owner, and to investigate this clue that had so fortunately fallen in his way.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE CLOSED DOOR

VERY early next morning the hon. Bertie set out on his errand of inquiry. By dint of consulting directories, and visiting influential friends at the Foreign Office, he learnt that the house in Park Lane was eased by His Royal Highness Nana Dun, the Peshwa of Umbarra. Umbarra was an independent state on the north-west frontier of India, friendly to British rule, he was told. But no one had news of Michael Hepburn emigrating there.

"We should have learnt of his presence there," said one of the officials with a wave of the hand, as much as to say, "Little escapes our wonderful system of espionage." "We keep a careful watch on these puppet rulers—they're up to all sorts of mischief if you leave them alone—and our spies would have brought us news of your friend. You can take it from me that Mr. Hepburn has not gone to Umbarra."

But the hon. Bertie was not of the same frame of mind. It was just possible, he thought, that his friend had gone back to the East and the Indian Office were not aware of it. And so he decided to make an attempt upon the house itself. There he might get an audience, and perhaps the information he wanted. But his bold attack met with failure. The native servant who opened the door to him was the embodiment of reticence. No, His Royal Highness was not in England. No, there was no one at home who could see him. No, he could tell him

nothing. And the hon. Bertie came away with a feeling that he was as far away as ever from getting news of his friend.

He returned home, very much out of spirits, to find a small note waiting for him. It had been pushed through the letter-box, so his major-domo informed him. It was written in a woman's hand, rather artistically inscribed, he thought, and smelt faintly of violets. He opened it, and a slip of paper fell out. He picked it up, and an exclamation of annoyance escaped him. It was the cheque he had given the girl with the red toque. Then he turned to the letter:

"DEAR MR. CHARTERS," it read, "I am returning your cheque. Yesterday when I got home I re-read the advertisement, and I found that the reward was offered for finding Mr. Hepburn. I cannot claim to have done that, so it would not be fair to accept your money. Thank you so much for your kindness in offering it nevertheless.

"Yours truly,

"MARGERY MANNERS."

The address was at the top, and he tore it off and put it in his pocket case.

"It's a case of foolish pride," he muttered. "The girl's starving, and she refuses opulence because of a foolish prejudice. We must see about this; yes, decidedly we must see about this."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MACHINE GUNS LABELLED COFFEE

MICHAEL HEPBURN lay back in his hammock beneath an awning, and watched the blue rocks of Gibraltar decrease in size as the yacht drew away from them. She was a speedy yacht, this yacht of Hindoo's—the largest and fastest private owned yacht in the world—and the British stronghold would soon be lost to sight. And as he looked out upon the still blue waters of the Mediterranean he thought that every minute took him nearer to his goal. What did the future hold for him? What would be his destiny in the land of eternal sun? A liner, the horizon behind her black with smoke-cloud, was steering a course to the Straits. No doubt she was bound for England—for the country where he had left all that was most precious to him. Had he done right to leave? The thought had been with him as he drove down by car to Southampton, and as the yacht creaked and tossed amid the stormy seas of the Bay. It had worried him considerably at first, but as the days passed his fears were vanishing. He had had his *congé* if ever a man had. What use lingering around the scene of his sorrow? No; far better to go and seek his fortune. Perhaps in time he would forget.

And so he gave himself up to the enjoyment of Hindoo's beneficence. And that was extravagant. His life upon the yacht was all that could be desired. A suite of cabins had been set aside for his own exclusive use, and they were furnished most

luxuriously. His own particular sanctum was the very apotheosis of comfort—carpets and rugs so soft that you could scarce feel that you were treading; chairs piled with cushions of eiderdown, and divans that would tempt the most ascetic to idleness. A gramophone of the latest make stood in one corner of this cabin and a cottage piano in another. Quaint furniture beautifully carved was ranged against the walls, and chintzes of a colour pleasing to the eye hung everywhere. It was a bower of bowers, and Michael suspected that Jahannarra must have had a hand in the furnishing of it. The next cabin contained a library, with all the best-known reference books and latest English novels—enough interesting literature to last a lifetime. Aft there was a racket court, where on a still day he and Harry Hawkins slogged and chased a small ball till one of them cried "Enough." As for the food, an epicure of epicures would have been satisfied. The cook was a magician, nothing less. No course was beyond his power. Dishes in and out of season were served and cooked with a flavour that was appetising to the extreme. And the wines provided were vintages that would have done credit to a city banquet. Yes! decidedly Hindoo's beneficence was extravagant. Why he of all men should be singled out as a partaker of it puzzled Michael not a little. Hindoo had crossed the seas, and had run him to earth in England. How he traced him after the court-martial, and ferreted him out in Arlington Road, was a secret that the Mohammadan would not divulge. "Sufficient is it that I had the good fortune to find you, sahib," said he when questioned. "Destiny has brought

you and me together, and the game she will play with us is known only to Allah." And so Michael was left to wonder why this man had gone to so much trouble to find him, when there must have been many others more convenient to lay hands on in the country he had left. He suspected that there was something more in it than the fact that he was the son of a man whom Hindoo had loved as a father. That would not surely send so busy an official, who must have a thousand important things to attend to as the chief minister of the State, on so arduous and long a journey. No, Michael made sure that there was some hidden reason for bringing him to Umbarra, and he hoped that subsequent events would divulge it. Meanwhile he would wait and enjoy Hindoo's munificence to the full. And, in full keeping with his resolve, he now lay back on his cushions of fairy down, with a box of the most expensive cigars that money could buy at his elbow, and, smoking, looked lazily out upon the sea of waters. His eyes travelled back whence they had come, and he saw the white cliffs of the Spanish shore now diminished to a mere white line along the horizon. A few fishing boats, the sun reflecting rays of fire from the metal-work on their decks, were trailing their nets half a mile to leeward. Here and there a solitary gull soared, hovering, watching for its prey, above the blue waters. And others sat floating upon the waters of a becalmed sea in little groups. And everywhere the immensity of space, and burning gold, and azure blue. It was a scene good to look on. It brought home to him his wasted life in those stuffy rooms in town. It was a stroke of luck to get away from his incarceration.

Here was life, and fresh air, and sunshine, and illimitable open space. The desire for these things was inherent in him, and he had them at last. He would be a fool to brood, and let these things pass by unenjoyed. The past was behind him; he would bury the past. And he lay and feasted his eyes on the scene lest he should miss one detail of it before the yacht plunged into the shadows of the coming night. Dusk found him still gazing seaward. The contours of the few ships that were in sight were now dim in the coming night mists. Gradually they disappeared altogether, and green and red lights began to appear like pin-pricks in the night. The shadow of a man appeared suddenly, emerging from the poop, and moved towards him. Michael turned and halloed.

"That you, Harry?"

And the next moment the shadow grew into the material form of the faithful batman.

"Aye, aye, sir," said he, placing a tray with a glass brim full upon the table by his elbow. "Brought you something to cool you down a bit before you dress for dinner. This 'ot weather makes drinking an 'eavenly occupation, sir. Lor', I'm as 'appy as a sandboy. I wouldn't be back in London for a fortune."

"Because drinking's heaven, Harry?"

"Oh, no, sir. I'm keeping a watch over myself. Any amount of liquor non-intoxic, but a limit of three per diem intoxic, sir."

"Splendid, Harry," said Michael with a laugh. "And I'm glad you are having a good time. It somehow compensates for the rotten month or two we had in town, eh?"

"Never 'ad such a time, sir. They stint me nothing. Same food as you, sir, same wine—only a limit of three glasses, of course, sir—and two cigars, and an ounce of baccy a day. Why, it's 'Hylisium'—nothing less."

All this in a loud voice, then, suddenly bending, he whispered:

"There's something I've discovered, sir. Should like you to see. Don't know what to make of it quite. Can't explain. We're watched. Meet me aft at twelve to-night."

And then, in stentorian tones:

"Any more orders, sir?"

"No, thank you, Harry. I shall be down in a few minutes."

"Very good, sir."

And Harry Hawkins left as silently as he had come.

For a long time Michael sat lost in thought. Then he reached out for the glass.

"Some mare's nest, I suppose," he mused. "Harry is always finding things he can't quite make out. Anyway, I shall keep the appointment. But I wonder why we're watched. I've noticed it, too. There's some game going on, and I must find out what it is."

He finished his drink and, rising, made for the lights of the cabin, where a change of clothes and a much-needed dinner awaited him.

. . . . . .

The moon was at the full, and the deck was flooded with its blue light, when Michael reached the top of the companion ladder to keep his appointment with Harry. His watch showed him that it

was close on twelve, and he stood in the shadows and waited. No one moved upon the deck, and the only sign of life was the black form of the officer moving upon the bridge, a dark silhouette against a background of the moon's blue light. Michael watched the solitary figure walking backwards and forwards at his post and fell into a brown study. Presently he was conscious of someone standing close to him.

"Hist, sir! Follow me quietly."

It was Harry, who had stolen on him unawares. The batman turned, and, keeping to the great shadows that lay like ghostlike forms across the deck, led him aft. Before a small companion, close to the black form of the capstan, he stopped with his hand upon the doorway.

"Why, you're taking me to the servants' quarters," whispered Michael. "What fool's game is this?"

"All my eye, sir."

And, so saying, Harry opened the door. A short flight of steps brought them on to a level floor.

"Half a minute, sir, and I'll strike a light."

Michael heard a great clatter of tinkling glass, then the sound of a scratching match, and the next moment he saw that Harry was lighting a ship's lantern, and that they were in a small cabin.

"All my eye, sir," said Harry. "This ain't no servants' quarters. Only a blind, sir."

And then, having closed the metal door of his lantern, he suddenly fell upon his knees, and began drawing back a thick carpet that lay upon the floor. Underneath was discovered a large trap-door, and this he raised.

"Now, sir," said he, "if you'll come down with me, and mind your shins, for there's not much room, I'll show you something."

And, taking his lantern, he slid out of sight into the black gaping hole beneath. Michael followed, and, after barking his shins once or twice in spite of precaution, at last found himself in a large compartment in the hold of the ship. Around him, piled one on top of the other, were hundreds of cases labelled "Coffee." A few of the outer ones had their lids broken, and disclosed rows of small tins neatly labelled with bright red tabs.

"And you've brought me here at the risk of breaking my neck to show me these?" cried Michael angrily, when he stood up and looked around him.

"'Alf a mo', sir. Never open fire till you've got the range."

And the redoubtable Harry drew forth a case which he had obviously examined before. He levered back a couple of boards, threw out two or three handfuls of straw, and something glittered in the rays of the lamp. It was the bright steel barrel and the tripod of a Maxim. Michael examined it carefully. It was of the latest type, there was no doubt of that.

"And there are thousands of them, sir," said Harry presently. "What do you make of it?"

"Why, that they don't play at the fighting game in Umbarra, Harry," said Michael. "They mean business."

"But why this secrecy, sir?"

"It is not always expedient, Harry, to let your enemies know the number of the guns you possess," suggested Michael. "It would be playing into

their hands. But we must get out of this. Come! They must not know that we have been prying into their secrets."

His answer to Harry's second question had been given at random. He did not know what to think yet. Back in the quiet comfort of his own cabin he sought for a solution. Why all this secrecy? Why should Hindoo run guns under cover, when he was going to land upon the shores of his own territory? It was not illegal. Why, then, this clandestine manœuvre? It might perhaps be, as he had haphazardly suggested, to keep the knowledge from the prying eyes of enemies. But another solution began to evolve itself, and he pictured a war against his own countrymen. Was this the answer to the enigma? Was this to be the end of his new career? Was destiny to send him forth once more, penniless and homeless, a seeker of employment in a world that did not seem to want him? One thing he would not do—take up arms against his own country Others, who had been cast out as he had been, had done it. He was not built that way. He must question this Hindoo carefully, and if his suspicions proved right cut adrift at once. Better a homeless outcast than a traitor.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A SAHIB SHALL LEAD YOU

"THEN you are not like the others, Hindoo? You have no desire to turn the usurping *feringhis* out of India? Why?"

Michael turned his eyes from the blue expanse of deserted sea, and fixed them on the burly form of the Mohammadan lolling in a basket chair by his side.

"Because we are not foolish, sahib. The gazelle does not war on the elephant, unless it turns suddenly mad. Umbarra is a flourishing state. Why? Because it has had the sense not to quarrel with the greatest nation in the world."

"So far, yes, Hindoo. But nevertheless the desire to do so may be instilled in your people. Then, when the opportunity comes, they will join in the revolution to get rid of the British."

"No, that shall never be, by the grace of Allah. What makes you think that?"

Hindoo Khan almost leapt from his chair, and, banging his hand down upon the small table that separated them, fixed the speaker with blazing eyes. It was as though Michael had touched a wire and galvanised some hidden forces in the man to life. He was taken aback by the suddenness of the outbreak, and the embarrassment that he had felt before in the presence of this man came upon him. He looked away across the sunlit waters, and tried to collect his thoughts.

"What makes you think that? Come; you

must have an answer. You have heard something from Umbarra, perhaps, to make you suspect that?"

"No, Hindoo. But I thought every quarter of India held some of these extremists."

"We have none in Umbarra. I have seen to that. When I was raised to the supreme honour of chief adviser to His Royal Highness Nana Dun, I made it my first duty to get rid of these pests. One by one they disappeared, never to be seen again, and I was the only man to know the manner of their going. I had seen enough of British greatness to know that it was folly to quarrel with it. I had marked the result of what happened to those that did—starvation, and pestilence, quickly taking the place of prosperity and good health. If a man bring you food, and riches, and education, and justice, who but a madman will make an end of him by thrusting a dagger in his heart? I saw these other native states cutting down the tree that grows the golden fruit, and I saw the folly of it. So to-day Umbarra is clean, and there is no state so opulent and happy, and I thank Allah for it."

He sank back in his chair and fell to drumming his fingers upon the arm of it. Michael watched him, entranced, the deep bass tones of his voice still ringing in his ears. It was not so much the man's words that were eloquent, as his manner of speaking them. He spoke with the excessive enthusiasm of one inspired, and had the gift of the born leader of debate—the power of making you believe that black is white because he wishes you so to believe. Michael's fears seemed to him to have been childish, and he wondered why he had ever distrusted this man.

"You have reassured me, Hindoo," said he presently, "and I am glad. I am beginning to look forward to this employment that you have offered me."

Hindoo Khan sat for a few minutes in silence, and then, leaning forward, again scrutinised Michael thoughtfully.

"Sahib," said he, "you must not think of leaving me. No, please don't interrupt. I tell you that for the last few days you have had the idea of deserting me. The fear that my country would be involved in a war with Britain has induced it. You have discovered the guns we carry. They were shipped by the orders of His Highness Nana Dun. But you need have no fear. There will be no war against your countrymen. Why? Because I lay down the law in Umbarra, and I am a seeker of peace. His Highness Nana Dun is but a puppet in my hands, and there is nothing to fear from him. The priests, who are so often disturbers of the peace, will have no war, because they dare not offend me. I have bought the priests. The extremists, as I told you, have disappeared. There is no one left to influence the people, and without that you cannot have war. Through all my ministry I have played for peace, and I shall play for peace till the end of time. Cast away these fears of yours, and go forward to Umbarra with a light heart, for I tell you that fortune awaits you in the land of my people." He rose to his feet. "I have work to do. Stay here and enjoy the beauties of the sea while you can. In two days we land at Samuni, and then good-bye to rest for who knows how long."

And, turning, he walked away.

Michael watched his burly form till it disappeared down the companion-way, and then, lighting a cigar and blowing out a great cloud of smoke, he burst into:

"Well, I'm damned. I did not tell a soul I contemplated leaving, and yet this fellow found it out. He reads one like a book. I must be careful of my thoughts even in future, that is all."

And he fell to wondering if Hindoo was right, and whether fortune or disaster awaited him in the land of Umbarra.

. . . . . .

A great white mist lay on the sea when at last the yacht dragged upon her anchors, and came to a standstill. Michael, standing upon the after-deck, could see nothing but drifting clouds of vapour. Beyond lay India, the land of enchantment, and it was hidden from him by an impenetrable veil. A few sounds, muffled in the breathless haze, reached him—sounds of people shouting; the tinkle of musical instruments; and the monotonous tap-tapping of a drum. He fell to wondering if these sounds proceeded from a ship or from the shore. And then the mist began to lift. A breeze was springing up, and blew warm upon his face. Gradually shadows of ships near by loomed out of the whiteness, and took shape. Then, beyond, the outlines of buildings on the land appeared like black silhouettes upon a sheet. The drab whiteness began to take on colours of rosy pink, which deepened into red and gold. Presently a great ball of yellow appeared, hanging in the mist, like a Chinese lantern swinging in space. And then the sun burst through,

and the mist was gone as though wafted away by magic. The world was awake, and the land of enchantment lay glinting in the morning sun.

The yacht lay at anchor in a small bay not a hundred yards from the shore. A large black cargo-boat with a red funnel, and a schooner with sails furled, were anchored near by. The water space around was covered with the home-made shallops of the fishermen. Upon the land, which shelved steeply from the beach, the sun glistened upon the black walls of a fort—a large, ugly building, turreted, with an enormous square bastion looming up from the centre—obviously a survival of the days when India was ruled by the Company. Round about this building lay the town of Samuni. Its houses, built of white stone, could be seen peeping through the banyan trees that grew thick upon the hill.

Michael stood, as one in a dream, watching the panorama of colour and movement that the lifting of the mist disclosed. In a few moments he would be ashore. There conveyance to Umbarra would be waiting for him. He must make up his mind whether to go with Hindoo or not. Once in Umbarra there would be no escape; he knew these people too well to doubt of that. It is true Hindoo had reassured him, but the man's personal magnetism had done that. Now that Hindoo was no longer by his side he began to feel conscious of a presentiment of coming trouble. What should he do? Go forward and trust to his destiny to pull him through, or break with Hindoo? The tap-tapping of the drum broke in upon his thoughts. Confound that drum, and confound the fellow who beat it! How could one think with such a monotonous din carrying

on? Where the devil did it come from? He cast his eyes about. The cargo-boat and the schooner were deserted. His tormentor was not afloat. Then, his glance travelling to the beach, and running north of the town, he saw the drummer sitting cross-legged upon a rock, his instrument of torture upon his lap—a native dressed with but a single loin-cloth, his head nodding as he struck slowly and lazily upon the gut. A small distance further on Michael saw a crowd of natives collected. Many different races were represented there, for their different coloured turbans stained the white of the pebbly beach like the paints on an artist's palette—red, and mauve, and pink; women in green satin drawers, and shawls of many different colours; Parsis with their yellow shirts, worn outside very tight-fitting pink trousers; Arab horse-dealers with their long robes and hoods—a very motley crowd. Michael wondered why they were here collected upon the deserted beach. There must be a thousand of them, he computed. What brought them there?

A hand laid upon his arm broke into his thoughts, and turning, he saw Hindoo smiling down upon him.

"Come, sahib, my country waits to give you welcome."

And, so saying, he turned and walked forward to where a boat was waiting to take them shorewards. For a moment Michael hesitated, and then, turning, followed Hindoo.

They were rowed ashore in a small boat and were landed right in the midst of the crowd that had raised Michael's curiosity. As he stepped ashore with Hindoo enlightenment came to him. They had come to welcome the statesman back to Umbarra.

A thousand turbans dipped down to the pebbles, and a great hush hung for a moment where before had been babbling din. But only for a moment. The hush was followed by cries and shrieks louder than before. Shouts of welcome in many dialects were hurled at them, imprecations to Allah to shower down blessings, prayers for alms. But one cry was repeated more often than another: "A sahib shall lead us. The holy one of Parrapat hath spoken. Allah bless the sahib." It rose loud and insistent above the other shouts, until it swelled into a roar. It rang in Michael's ears for some time before its meaning began to dawn on him. Then he looked at the crowd. All eyes were turned upon him. He was the cynosure for the multitude. They pressed round him, and soon he found himself detached from Hindoo. He was conscious of one great fellow dressed in the flowing hood and cape of the Arab horse-dealer seizing his hand and raising it to his lips, then of a sea of black faces all about him, and voices yelling up at him until he became deaf with their shoutings. Suddenly the voice of Hindoo ordering the crowd to make way reached him, and gradually they moved to one side and Hindoo joined him. Then together they made their way up the steep pebbly beach. The crowd followed for a hundred paces or so, and then fell away, and Michael, searching for a reason, saw a Mussulman sitting before a fire that was burning brightly upon the stones. He was fully dressed, and seated in the full glare of the sun. He knew him at once as an ascetic, or holy man, undergoing the penance of his order. He had met these worshippers before, and was not greatly surprised. There are many to be found in

the land of fanaticism. The holy man was signalling to the crowd to hold back, and his command was law apparently, for they began to draw away as though by magic. A few yards from the fire Hindoo stopped and made a low obeisance.

"Pray to Allah, O holy one, that he may guide an erring son into paths of righteousness," said he.

"It is well," said the ascetic, great beads of perspiration dripping from his face. "I see that thou hast listened to the words of the holy one, who speaketh through the mouth of Allah. Thou hast brought the sahib with thee. It is well. Go in peace."

And so they passed on and came presently to a ridge of rock that led up to a road, and the greenery of jungle. And as Michael laboured in the footsteps of Hindoo he fell to wondering what all this mystery of his reception might mean. Why should they welcome him in so strange a way? What was the meaning of their strange words? Hindoo had engineered his popularity with the people for some good reason of his own, but what that reason was only time could bring to light. At the top of the ridge, standing upon the road, a large motor-car was waiting. A native servant stood by the open door waiting for them to enter.

"Come, sahib," said Hindoo, when they came up with it. "In two hours' time we shall be in Umbarra."

He jumped in as he spoke, and Michael stood for a moment hesitating. Should he listen to this presentiment of coming trouble that was strong upon him? Should he go back while there was still time? Or should he go on and see it through?

For a moment only he hesitated, and then, jumping in, sank down into the soft cushions by Hindoo's side.

He would take the risk, and trust to destiny to pull him safely through.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A FAIRY STORY

THE girl—she was nearing her tenth birthday—sat at the tiny table in the tiny room, and sucked the end of a lead pencil vigorously. Before her lay a penny exercise book in which she had been writing. Apparently the flow of thought had ceased, for the pencil, instead of doing its work upon the paper, was staining her pretty lips with blue. For a long time she sat deep in thought, occasionally tugging upon a thick yellow pigtail that lay across her shoulder and was tied with a large blue ribbon. Then, suddenly getting up, she crossed the room to a tiny window that looked down upon a dirty street.

"Oh, I'm so tired of this place," she murmured. "If only auntie could sell a story and make a lot of money."

A pretty little hand began to trace figures upon the condensed moisture on the glass of the window, and her thoughts went wandering again. Then presently they came fleeting back and she spoke them aloud.

"It would be heaven. And I should have lots and lots of frocks like other girls, and heaps and heaps of sweets, and go to a theatre, and have jam instead of dry bread. But I don't believe auntie will ever sell that story. Oh, if only I could win that prize—a pound for the best fairy story sent to the editor of *Little Playmate*. What a beano we'd have, auntie and I; a trip to the sea, and

plenty of jolly things to eat, and I'd buy her a silver purse ; no, I wouldn't, 'cause I don't think I should have enough over. But I should have to buy her something. I wonder what she would like."

Silence for a few minutes while she battled the question in her mind, and she fell to tracing weird figures on the surface of the pane—a central figure that looked like the moon with a face ; around it smaller ones, its satellites, which resembled matches with squiggly arms and legs. Presently, her thoughts bringing no happy solution, she said aloud :

" But what's the use ? I shan't win the prize, 'cause I can't get an idea. Auntie will have to do it after all."

She opened the window and gazed at the dull brick houses opposite—dirty houses with window-boxes of dust-beladen flowers—and an expres ion of despair settled upon her pretty little face. Her dreams of Elysium to be gained by one pound sterling had faded away. She was back in her shabby room, with no hope that to-morrow would bring her surfeit of happiness.

Suddenly a horn sounded in the street below, and, looking down, she saw a large motor-car with a luxurious limousine body come to a standstill beneath the window. A hawker with a barrow had turned it across the street and blocked the way. An elderly man lolled back against the cushions within, and the girl fell to wondering what sort of a man he must be.

" I bet it's a duke," she hazarded presently. She had not heard of city magnates, or company promoters, or men who were something in the city. Anyone with wealth to her must belong to

the aristocracy. "Or it may be a prince. A prince——" The thought pleased her, and she looked closer at the occupant of the car. "Yes," she cried excitedly, "it must be a prince. He has a beard. All princes have beautiful golden beards. I wonder if his is golden."

She leant out of the window to satisfy herself, but by this time the hawker had drawn his barrow to one side, and the bearded occupant of the limousine disappeared from view as the car continued its journey.

"What a pity! If only it had been a prince come to take me to his beautiful golden palace. Why, yes——" An idea struck her, and she ran to the table, and, seizing the pencil, began to write rapidly. The plot for her fairy story lay in embryo in her mind, and she transferred it to life upon the paper in a bold round hand as fast as her busy little fingers would permit her. Now and again stuck for a word, she would sit silently biting the end of the pencil, or tugging at her pigtail of gold, and, the word occurring to her, race on again as rapidly as before. As the story unfolded itself two little cheeks became flushed with excitement. The thought of the pound sterling was with her as she wrote. To her it was as good as won, and with it the world of pleasure would be an open door. Excitement mastering her, she began to repeat what she wrote aloud. "'And the room was very dark. And the little girl heard a mouse squeak—she thought it was a burgular—she was horribly frightened. And then the door opened and the prince peeped in.' Peeped? That's rotten. A prince wouldn't peep—only housemaids peep." Her

brows puckered with annoyance, and she fell to sucking the pencil-end again. Phrases occurred to her. "'And the prince stole in.' No, that's too much like the burgular. 'And the prince rushed in.' No, that's silly, 'cause he wasn't in a hurry. 'And the prince——'" The door of the room was opened and a man came in. He was immaculately dressed, and wore a monocle. It was the hon. Bertie Charters. The girl saw him, and, jumping up, dropped her pencil.

"Who are you?" she asked nervously.

"I am the prince," said the hon. Bertie, and promptly flopped into the one shabby easy chair that the room contained.

"A prince? Oh, how lovely!"

"Yes, and I've come to see your mother."

"My mother? But I haven't got a mother. She died ages and ages ago."

"I am sorry. I came to see Miss Manners."

"Oh, you mean auntie—Auntie Marge." A look of disappointment came into the pretty face. "I hoped at first that you were my prince, and that you had come to take me to your beautiful palace."

She ran to his side, and, flopping down upon a ragged footstool, looked up at him with eyes sparkling with admiration.

"Do you know, I've always longed and longed to see a real prince. And isn't it funny! I was just writing about one when you came in. But where's your beard? I thought all princes had lovely golden beards."

"Not all. I'm an exception," said the hon. Bertie with a laugh. "But cheer up! I'll be your prince, and not auntie's."

" Oh, that will be ripping ! And you'll take me to your court and introduce me to all your courtiers ? "

" Perhaps. If Auntie Marge will let me."

" Oh, dear ! Auntie Marge is sure to be nasty and cross, and refuse to let me go."

" We'll see about that," said the hon. Bertie. " But tell me, when do you expect Auntie Marge back, eh ? "

" She may come in to tea, or she may not."

" Well, I'm going to wait. Let's have tea."

" But we can't. There isn't any bread, and we used the last drop of tea this morning, and the gas meter wants a shilling in the slot."

" Fiddle-de-dee ! We'll soon mend all that. Get your hat on."

" Get my hat on ? "

" Yes. We're going out to get some tea and things. And you mustn't keep a prince waiting, you know. It isn't done in best circles."

With a glad cry of " This is just stunning ! " she raced from the room, and returning presently with a creation of straw and daisies and pink streamers, they sauntered out together.

Half an hour later they returned, laden with many parcels, which they set down upon the table. The girl, radiantly happy, peeped into each bag to see that none were missing. " Yes, those are the bath buns, and the jumbles, and the doughnuts, and the iced cake, and the chocolates, and the crystallised fruit. And two pounds of tea. Now, why did you buy all that ? Auntie never buys more than a quarter at a time."

" Princes always buy in large quantities," said

the hon. Bertie, mopping his brow with a silk handkerchief. "Now, where's this gas meter?"

Ten minutes later tea was served and the hon. Bertie was reclining in the shabby easy chair.

"Now, Cinderella," said he, sipping tea upon the surface of which floated many tea-leaves, "tell me something about yourself. What's your name, first of all?"

"Miss Dulcie Wright."

"Well, Miss Dulcie Wright," said the hon. Bertie with a laugh, "what do you do with yourself all day long?"

"Oh, auntie gives me lessons for two hours in the morning. Then I have to write lots and lots of horrid sums. In the afternoon I go for a walk. And in the evening I read a book—when auntie can afford to buy a new one, which isn't very often. And it is the same every day, and I do get so awfully bored. It would be glorious to go out and see the world."

"And you shall. I'll take you."

Two little hands clapped together in ecstasy.

"Really and truly? You mean it? Oh, you're just the best prince out, and it will be glorious."

For a moment silence, and then, with a mouth full of jumble:

"What shall we go and see, Prince?"

"Well, what about the pantomime for a start?"

"The pantomime? Oh, yes, I've heard of that, and I've seen the pictures in the papers. And I've——"

But the sentence was not finished, for the door opened and Margery Manners stood looking at them with surprise written upon her pretty face. The hon. Bertie rose to his feet.

"I hope you'll forgive me," said he, "but I called to see you on business, and, finding you out, took the liberty to invite myself to tea."

"And you have been doing yourselves rather well," said Margery Manners, regarding the large array of confectionery upon the table with an amused smile. "Well, anyway, I hope my niece has entertained you in my absence?"

"Oh, yes. We're great pals, aren't we, Miss Dulcie?"

"Rather! And the prince has asked me to go to the pantomime with him. You will let me, auntie, won't you?"

"Perhaps."

"I want you both to come," said the hon. Bertie Charters pleadingly. "It would give me the greatest delight, Miss Manners. I am suffering from depression and need a tonic. Your niece's lively chatter has bucked me up no end. You will not refuse physic to a sick man, Miss Manners?"

"I think you are a humbug, Mr. Charters, and have half a mind to have nothing more to do with you."

"And I have half a mind that you require some tea," said the hon. Bertie coaxingly. "You will think differently then. Now, then, Cinderella, off with you and boil some more water. Your aunt is fairly thirsting for a cup of tea."

With a cry of "I'll get it in no time" the girl ran off, and Margery Manners asked severely:

"What is the meaning of this, pray?"

"I have brought back the cheque. It was very stupid of you to return it. You have earned it fairly and squarely. The information you gave me

was very valuable. I am on the track of the man I wish to find. Please take the cheque. I shall feel very hurt if you do not accept it."

He held out the small slip of blue paper. A pair of angry, flashing eyes confronted him. The cheque was snatched from his hand and torn into small pieces.

"That's what I think of your cheque," said she.

"You have torn up two years of happiness," said the hon. Bertie.

He was disappointed, for he longed to help this pretty girl who he knew must have a terrible battle with life. He read starvation in her face, and need in the faded clothes she wore. For the first time in his life the dilettante had been at the point of learning the truth of Christ's words, "It is better to give than to receive," and his gift was flung back into his face. Yes, he was disappointed. The girl read it, and a pang of sorrow touched her.

"I tell you what, Mr. Charters. The day you find Mr. Hepburn I'll take your cheque."

"Done," said he with emphasis. "And we'll be friends?"

"Yes, if you like, and provided you remain on your best behaviour."

Cinderella returned with the pot of tea.

"Why, whatever's happened between you two?" said she. "You're as serious as two owls."

"Oh, we've just been fixing things up, and we've arranged to go to the pantomime to-morrow. Haven't we, Miss Manners?"

"Well, of all—— Yes, I suppose we have."

An hour later the hon. Bertie departed, and as he sank back into the soft cushions of his car he felt

that he had spent an afternoon that had done him a world of good. His lethargy was gone. He felt that life was worth living after all. And his plans for the future opened up a prospect that promised happy days.

CHAPTER TWENTY

DEAD HOPES REVIVED

THE lure of pleasure is one of the devil's fishing-lines, and the hon. Bertie was hooked and being fast drawn to perdition. All his promises and good resolutions for making good to Michael Hepburn were forgotten. He was absorbed by his new interest in life—the enacting of his character as Prince Charming. A sequence of theatres followed the visit to the pantomime; snug little *tête-à-tête* dinners; motor trips into the wilds. The house in Jermyn Street opened its doors, and one Cyril Valentine was kept very busy. Tempting menus had to be arranged, new flower decorations devised, and new schemes to amuse the young thought out daily. Three weeks of bliss followed. To one little lady they were weeks of fairy life. To her the house in Jermyn Street was a palace of palaces, and her prince a prince indeed. To the other they were days of joy too; a new vista of life lay open before her, new desires, new hopes. A thought as to the propriety of it all marred some of the pleasure, but Prince Charming behaved himself, and so far all was well.

One day, when returning to his house by way of Park Lane, the hon. Bertie ran into Dorothy West. The meeting was a little embarrassing to him, for he had not been to see her for weeks, and he felt very mean.

"Good morning, Bertie," said she. "You are quite a stranger."

"Yes. I am afraid I have had no success. I did not like to bother you when I had no news."

He did not tell the truth. What man would have done? He looked at her carefully and thought that she had aged somewhat. There were lines in her pretty face that should not have been there. She had not forgotten, then. He felt angry with himself for those weeks of leisure.

"You're an old silly, Bertie," said she. "You know I am always delighted to see you, under any conditions. You're just coming in to tell me all about things."

In her private sanctum he caught sight of several small packages, and bottles, and parcels of bandages.

"Why, whatever's this, Dorothy?" he asked. "Are you going to open a chemist's shop?"

"Stupid boy," said she. "Do I look like an alchemist? No, I've taken to nursing."

"Nursing?"

"Yes, I'm learning to follow in the footsteps of Florence Nightingale. At present I'm only a dabbler. I'm taking a course at St. Thomas's, and in time I hope to become qualified."

"Good heavens!" said the hon. Bertie. "That you should come to this!"

"And why not, Bertie? Surely it is better and more useful than leading the life of an idle spinster?" Her gay tone took on a touch of sadness. "You see, life has become very dull lately. Father has grown very irritable since—since things happened, and I've found it a trifle dull."

"Dull!" He knew that the words were a subterfuge, and that her suffering lately must have

been great. He felt more than ever a miserable cur for his neglect of her.

"If only I could make you happy," he said sincerely. "Michael must be found. I shall not rest till you two meet again."

Dorothy's pride was hurt sorely by Michael's desertion of her—for it could be nothing more than desertion, she argued, else surely he would have written her a line—and she was very angry that another should share the knowledge of her slight. She regretted now that she had ever made the hon. Bertie her confidant.

"I'm not so sure that I wish to meet him again," said she with blushing cheeks.

"What? You don't mean, Dorothy, that you don't care for him after all?"

A great hope reawakened in the hon. Bertie. His old love, dormant for weeks, came to life. The door that he thought was closed for ever had come unlatched. Would it open to him?

"This has completely taken the wind out of me," said he. "It means that there is still hope for me, Dorothy. By jove! if I thought that I should be the happiest fellow in the world."

He went to the chair in which she sat, and, bending down over her, whispered:

"Tell me, little lady, is there any hope?"

Dorothy remained silent for a minute, with averted eyes.

"I cannot tell," she said at last, as one driven. "Find Michael. That is the key to the riddle. Somehow I think he no longer cares. I have two very dear men friends—I cannot bear to lose them both."

The hon. Bertie went away from the interview as one treading on air. Hope had sprung up afresh in his heart. He must find Michael Hepburn by hook or by crook. The meeting might bring him the glad tidings that the door to his paradise was open indeed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE PESHWA OF UMBARRA

MICHAEL HEPBURN woke with a start to find a native servant wearing a pith topi, and a pair of much-prized khaki slacks cut short at the knee, standing like a statue a few yards away. He had been waiting evidently for him to wake.

"Well?" he asked in Hindustani. "What is it?"

"I have a letter for the presence. I thought——"

"Thank you, Mukkan. Bring me a lemon-squash. My sleep has made me thirsty."

He glanced at the small package that had been handed to him. It was addressed in a bold hand with artistic flourishes to the capitals, and bore an English stamp.

"Now who on earth could have found me out in this place?" he murmured, and opened it. It was from Jahannarra. She wrote:

"DEAR SAHIB MICHAEL,—In a few weeks I shall come to Umbarra. I shall have finished my music course at the Academy then. How I long to be with you in my dear country again. It is very dull in this land of fogs and cold, especially now the only Englishman I know has gone. Are you writing the story you promised about the beautiful prophetess? No, I expect you want her by you to get a little 'local colour,' as you say in your idiom. I am very dull, and shall write to you often. You will not be cross

with your servant, will you? It makes the days of waiting go so quickly.

"We will have great times together, Sahib Michael, will we not? And perhaps moments can be spared to rehearse some of the great scenes for the master book. Good-bye.

"JEHAN."

Michael read the letter, and lying back in his cosy chair gave himself up to thought. His eyes travelled along the low balcony of the verandah, with its wooden tubs of Oriental trees rich in blossom, and out to the great palm trees that grew in the compound of the bungalow. It was his bungalow while he remained in Umbarra—a building of ten rooms, all luxuriously furnished. There were servants by the score to wait on him. The *peshwa's* commissariat supplied his table with the fat of the land free. His salary was a thousand pounds a year. Yes, assuredly he had fallen on his feet. And now this letter. That held out to him the promise in a few weeks to come of a companionship that would be very welcome. He had thought of Jehan often since he had left England. Her open, child-like personality appealed to him. Yes, the future promised to be very entertaining.

A sound like the escape of steam through the exhaust valve of an engine broke into his thoughts. Casting about for the source from which it proceeded, he presently espied Harry Hawkins sitting a few yards away, almost hidden beneath the fronds of an enormous palm.

"Hallo, Harry. What in heaven's name are you doing in this heat?"

"Polishing your boots, sir."

"You ought to be resting."

No answer; only the hissing of the human steam-engine.

"I say you ought to be resting. Hang it! Stop at once."

The pressure rose, and the steam continued to escape with a greater noise than ever. The order of the master was ignored.

"Confound it! If you don't stop at once I'll put you in the cells."

The fronds were pushed aside, and the red face of Harry Hawkins appeared. In his hands he held a pair of riding boots shining like burnished silver.

"Sorry, sir. It would have spoiled 'em if I'd left off before I'd put the finishing touches. Boots is funny things. If you only 'alf clean 'em they never forgives yer. You can polish and polish, but they never gets the same shine. Ain't they beauties?" He held them up with the pride of an artist exhibiting one of his masterpieces. "It will break my 'eart when they're returned to the Q.M. to be written off. It will be like parting with a life-long pal, sir."

"You're an amusing fellow, Harry," said Michael with a laugh. "If I had shown the same enthusiasm for my work in the Army I should have become a General."

"And where there's life there's 'ope," said Harry, flicking at a tiny speck of dust that had floated on to one of the boots with a blue silk handkerchief.

"A born optimist, Harry. But tell me how you like being here. Better than London, eh?"

"Better than London, sir? Why, it's celestial.

It's ' Hylisium ' on earth. Never 'ad such a billet in all my campaigning. Servants to wait on me 'and an' foot. Nothink to do but the genteel work of polishing your boots ; a canteen that must 'ave dropped from 'eaven, and open all the day ; and an 'orse to ride. What more can a man want, sir ? "

The native servant silently glided in with the lemon-squash, and, having deposited it upon the table by Michael's side, as silently glided away.

" Well, I hope it's a permanent billet, Harry."

" Good 'eavens, sir, you don't mean to say you're thinking of chucking it ? "

" No, Harry. But they might chuck us."

Harry breathed a sigh of relief. A terrible fear had seized him. For a moment he thought that his master contemplated a return to England.

" No fear of them chucking you, sir," said he with fervour. " You should just hear what they think of you in the town. You are a little tin god, sir, if you'll excuse the expression—the fellow who's going to save them and their blessed country from perdition. I got it from a Parsi who wore a red shirt which he'd forgot to tuck into a pair of blue reach-me-downs. He was talking to a crowd in the bazaar. From what he said—of course I ain't much at their lingo—I took it that the priests have threatened an awful bust up in the near future, and have fixed on you to see them safely out of it."

The sound of footsteps mounting the steps of the verandah came to them. The head and shoulders of a man appeared above the floor level. It was Hindoo Khan.

" Well, sahib," said he, coming forward, " I hope you like your quarters ? "

"Excellent, my dear Hindoo," said Michael, rising to welcome him. "I have been given a reception due to a Field-Marshal. I hope I shall come up to expectations."

"You cannot help yourself, sahib. It is the decree of Allah."

"And I hope you have read his decree aright, Hindoo. You have promised your subjects that I am to be their saviour. It would be a terrible thing if there was some mistake."

"Nonsense, sahib. I tell you there is no mistake. But come; my master is waiting for you to ride with him. We must not keep His Highness waiting."

A cry of "Thank God I cleaned them boots" came from the interior of the bungalow, and Harry Hawkins appeared with the necessary articles in his hand. In a few moments Michael was booted and spurred. A pith topi and switch were handed to him, and he followed Hindoo down the verandah steps. At the compound gate a crowd of horsemen were waiting. As they drew near one of them rode forward and came closer to the gate. He was a small man riding a large white Arab horse. He was dressed in the correct English polo kit. His jacket and breeches must have been made by a tailor who knew his business, for they fitted his well-made figure like a glove. His boots bore a polish that would have made even the artist Harry envious, and his massive gold spurs were resplendent enough for a captain in the Guards.

"I hope you have been made comfortable, sahib," said he in excellent English when Michael had saluted him in the English Army manner, a direction given him by Hindoo as they came down the steps.

His excellency was a great admirer of the English Army apparently, and it always pleased him to be saluted in the English way. "If they have not supplied you with everything you desire inform me and I will set things right."

"I am well looked after, thank you, your Highness," said Michael. "There is only one thing I desire—to get to work."

"Ah! Then you can commence at once. I have come for you with that object."

He signalled to someone in the crowd, and a native came forward leading a chestnut mare—a beast with graceful lines. Michael's criticising eye told him that her sire must have come from a racing stable.

"Can the sahib ride?" There was a merry twinkle in the *peshwa's* eye as he asked the question, and the retinue of horsemen exchanged meaning glances.

"Yes, your Highness, I can ride," said Michael. His inborn modesty forbade him to say that he had been considered one of the finest horsemen in the British Army.

"Then mount, sahib, and we will ride together."

The retinue of horsemen moved their horses away, but kept their eyes on Michael. Things were going to happen.

The mare stood as still as a statue. Her appearance would have satisfied a would-be buyer of a lady's hack. But Michael luckily had seen the exchanged glances of the *peshwa's* followers, and he was prepared. He took the reins from the native and swung himself quickly into the saddle. His knees were home and gripping with a hold of steel

before the mare could play her tricks. And it was a good thing too for Michael. No sooner had he sunk into the saddle than the mare was away like a flash, bucking and jumping, curvetting, and leaping like a thing possessed. Stones flew, and the retinue of horsemen scattered. Michael felt angry at the trick that had been played him. The mare was only partly trained and must have been in the stable a week. But his anger left him immediately. His one desire was to keep his seat, and shame the perpetrators of this practical joke. Round and round the mare dashed, quicker and quicker as she found the man upon her back still kept his hold; now rising upon her hind legs till it seemed that man and beast must topple backwards, now curvetting in movements so quick that the eye could hardly follow them. Michael held on like grim death. His features set in determination for mastery. The boy-like cries of the *peshwa* urging him to keep on, and the shouts of laughter from the others when once or twice he was nearly unseated, were lost to him. He heard nothing, saw nothing but the heaving shoulders of the beast he sat. One or the other would be master. Which? Up and down, backwards and forwards, now this way, now that—a very whirlwind of movement. Once he was within an ace of having his leg crushed against the wooden palings of the compound. Things were getting too dangerous. He raised his whip and brought it down with all the strength of his arm upon the flank of the mare. Up to now he had spared ill-treatment. She snorted at this sudden punishment, and steadied down for a moment. But only for a moment; the next she was away like a flash of light. A long piece

of undulating ground lay before them, and she crossed it in Derby time. Then came a long climb, growing steeper and steeper as it reached the summit of a hill. Across the level Michael had let the mare take the bit, but half a mile up the incline he had regained it. The mare was weakening. Her freshness was wearing off. But she galloped on with the obstinacy of her sex. Then, where the gradient rose steeper near the summit, she broke into a canter. Arriving at the top of the hill, Michael pulled her easily to a halt. She was down and out. He felt her sides heaving and falling beneath the saddle as she panted for air, saw the lather of sweat dripping in white pools upon the sandy ground where she stood. Before them lay the jungle—a sea of giant grasses and shining leaved banyan trees —but Michael was hardly conscious of it. He was flushed with victory, and had only eyes for the mare.

For a few minutes he let her stand and breathe, and then, when she quietened down, he tried to turn her to go back. She bucketed again, still showing fight. Then the steel crop descended again, and the last dying kick of a fight was gone. She turned and walked down the slope as one who has met her master.

Half-way across the level came riding Nana Dun, followed by his retinue. There was a look of admiration shining in his dark eyes.

"I have never seen a better exhibition of horsemanship," said he. "And that is a compliment from one who rules a land of horsemen."

"A trifle fresh, that is all, your Highness," said Michael, glancing at the retinue. Their faces wore

the look of those who have been greatly disappointed. "But she is quiet now. I do not think there will be any further trouble."

"A man who can ride like you, sahib, will certainly be welcome in Umbarra," said Nana Dun with emphasis. "We live for riding and polo. Come, I want to present you to your command. We will ride together."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE CAMP OF EXERCISE AS BURLESQUE

NANA DUN set his horse's head southwards from the town, and, Michael following his example, they rode side by side across the undulating plain.

As they went His Highness talked of his horses and polo matches with the gusto of a boy, and Michael, listening respectfully, had time to study his companion.

He said that here was a boy of a man, with only a boy's cares. The dark face, with its slightly hooked nose and merry, twinkling eyes, would have been handsome but for a chin that drooped excessively. If physiognomy were anything of a science, then this trait marked the man as a weakling. And as Michael listened to the ceaseless chatter of matches won and lost, he saw clearly the bait that Hindoo had laid to get the rule of a kingdom into his own hands. He learnt another side of the man's character presently—his innate vanity.

"My name as a polo player will live after me, captain sahib," said he with seriousness. "Men tell me that my fame as a polo player has spread even to the home of the Great Empress. You have heard your countrymen speak of Nana Dun. Is it not so?"

Michael told him that his sojourn in the land of his fathers had been short, else surely he would have heard men speak of the world's best polo player. This adulation would have satisfied most men. But not so Nana Dun. His pride was

hurt apparently, and he lapsed into a sulky silence.

"The man's a weak fool," thought Michael. "If ever trouble comes to Umbarra, it will be through this fellow's vanity." With a soldier's instinct he looked from whence the attack would come. He was right, as events subsequently proved.

They had come to a part of the plain by this time where the growth was low and stunted. Riding to the top of a small mound, His Highness reined in his horse.

"We can watch the manœuvres from here, captain sahib," said he. "You shall now see my army perform the camp of exercise."

A gun popped somewhere from the undergrowth. Apparently it was a signal. They were looking down upon a flat level of country covered with small bushes and grasses. Suddenly Michael caught sight of a line of men in extended order about a mile in front of them. They were moving towards the mound. It was obviously the place of assault.

For a few minutes the line moved forward without interruption, and then suddenly the scrub at the foot of the mound vomited fire—rapid fire. The defence had woke up at last. This salute in blank suggested nothing to the leader of the skirmishers, apparently, for his men moved forward still. They advanced slowly and laboriously, like a party searching for blackberries by the way. No quick rushes were made, no cover taken. Michael smiled to himself. He would have much to teach these little black warriors of Umbarra.

Again the pop-pop of rifle fire from the foot of the mound, but the enemy advanced stolidly. After

all, it was blank, that cracking ahead. It would not kill. Why should they hurry themselves? That seemed their attitude. And then suddenly, when the firing died away, the leader of this line took it on himself to issue an order, and one by one his men sank down and hid behind a bush or tuft of yellow grass. Another line straggled up from their hiding-places immediately on the left of the one that had disappeared, and came forward at the same snail's pace.

"Presently they will take the mound," said Nana Dun, watching the manœuvres through a pair of glasses. "It is the Subahdar Pandy's idea. He is my present commander. A great idea, eh? He served for some years in one of your Indian regiments, and has brought back your system of training. What do you think of the display?"

"It is badly executed, your Highness," said Michael. "The subahdar's instructions are not well carried out. The men advance too slowly. They should come in sharp, short rushes. Why, a squad of riflemen who could shoot would wipe them out in a few minutes. And the defending party should not open at a mile range with rapid fire."

He gave his judgment frankly, and expected an outburst from the man by his side. The reply surprised him.

"You are right, captain sahib," said Nana Dun. "I see clearly what is wrong. They present too good a target. It is well that you have come to train my soldiers. Subahdar Pandy is incompetent, and only partly trained."

He turned his attentions again to the creeping line of attack. Slowly, and in the same lackadaisical

manner, the sections advanced till they were within a hundred yards of the mound. Then, when they formed one long line, all movement ceased. But whereas Michael had noticed only two sections advancing, he now perceived that the line contained three. One had crept up unperceived, then. The man in command of that section knew his business. Michael decided to learn the name of that commander.

A low murmur now arose from the scrub where the attackers lay hidden, and passed along the line. It was the command to fix bayonets being whispered from man to man. Slowly the murmur faded away into the distance, and a great silence fell upon the scene of action. It was the calm before the storm. Suddenly a harsh order came from someone hidden in the scrub. Instantly black faces peeped grinning from behind their hiding-places of bushes and yellow grass. Then the attackers rose to their feet, and came running pell-mell towards the mound. A motley crowd they were, some dressed only in ragged loin-cloths, their skins shining oily black in the sunlight, others in flowing robes of their caste, multi-coloured robes torn and dishevelled by their passage through the scrub. On they came, brandishing sticks and clubs which were no doubt meant to represent rifles. And as they rushed forward they yelled and shrieked their war cries, each warrior yelling for all he was worth, as though that would help them to take their objective.

The defenders remained passive for a moment or two, and then rifles began to pop here and there. Then a volley of fire burst forth, and ceased as suddenly. The defenders had risen from their

hiding-place at the foot of the mound and were standing on guard to meet the attack.

Michael saw a small man, riding a large horse, suddenly appear at the head of the attack. He was urging them on, crying loudly, and waving a curved sword above his head. This was obviously the Subahdar Pandy, the promoter of this camp of exercise. Michael looked at him closely. He was an insignificant little fellow, with a face that reminded him of a black German Jew, a large beaked nose, and a pair of small, shifty eyes.

Suddenly, when the two lines were about to meet, the subahdar gave the order to cease action. It rattled out shrill and loud above the din, and reached Michael where he stood upon the mound. He expected to see the men stop running and fall away. But the order was not obeyed. It was too tame an ending for these dark warriors, apparently. The two lines met. Order turned into disorder. Sticks and clubs were raised, and the men lay about them with a will. They meant to get value for their money. They had not moved across a mile of country, scratched their limbs against briars till the blood came, stooped under cover till their backs ached, for nothing. They had been worked up for a fight, and a fight they would have.

Those that had rifles—a few of the defenders—used them. Men began to go down like ninepins. The small man upon the horse rode in and out of the crowd and yelled to them to break away, but his orders fell on deaf ears. Once or twice he nearly got clubbed by a swinging rifle.

Michael watched the fight with a smile upon his face. It was the camp of exercise in burlesque. The

sight of Subahdar Pandy, riding hither and thither amongst the fight that he could not stop, with the perspiration running in drips from the end of his crooked nose, was bordering on the ludicrous.

Michael fell to wondering how it would all end. Presently he was conscious of a tall figure moving amongst the mass of struggling men—a young man with the frame of a Hercules. He seemed to be the only one amongst the crowd who had not lost his head. Calmly, and in a steady voice, he ordered them to cease fighting and fall in. His command was of weight apparently, for men began to make their way out of the crush and retire to a spot a few yards away. Here they formed up in sections. Their example was soon followed by the others, and presently the scene of the combat was deserted. A few remained behind, lying senseless upon the sandy ground. The defenders had made good use of their rifle butts.

The army of Umbarra now stood drawn up in column of companies upon their parade ground, and Subahdar Pandy, giving the command to stand easy, rode forward towards the mound. When he rode away the man who had brought order out of chaos rode to the head of the column. Michael pointed him out to Nana Dun.

"Who is that?" he asked. "The second in command?"

"It is my cousin, Mian Gul," said His Highness. "A young man who is very popular with the people."

"He is a good soldier," said Michael. "I shall have work for him to do."

Subahdar Pandy rode up and saluted smartly.

The perspiration still trickled from the point of his nose. He cast a glance at Michael that was filled with enmity.

"This is my new commander, Subahdar Pandy," said Nana Dun, pointing to Michael. "From to-day he takes command. You will obey his orders as though they proceeded from me."

And His Highness turned his back on the late commander and addressed Michael.

"I ride back to Umbarra," said he. "Follow me when you have given your commands. I have plans to discuss with you."

And, putting spurs to his horse, he galloped away and left them.

"You must not take this transference of command too seriously, Subahdar Pandy," said Michael consolingly, when His Highness was out of earshot. "We must work together as one command. Your advice will be invaluable."

Subahdar Pandy bowed low, the look of enmity still in his eyes.

"The attack to-day had a few faults," continued Michael. "Your orders were not well carried out. We must choose better section commanders. By the way, who was in command of the left?"

"It was my second in command, Mian Gul, sahib."

"A good piece of work, subahdar," said Michael. "That man will be useful to us. Bring him along this evening to my bungalow. We will hold our first council. But your parade is getting restless." The motley crowd upon the parade ground were yelling orders to their commanders to take them home. "Give them the order to march."

The subahdar saluted and turned away, and Michael watched the ragged army move away. What an ill-trained rabble! Yes, there was much for him to do. He touched his horse with the spurs and cantered back towards Umbarra. And as he went the scowling face of Subahdar Pandy presented itself to him.

"I have made an enemy already in Umbarra," was his thought.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

AN ARMY IN THE MAKING

THE weeks that passed were very busy ones for Michael Hepburn. There was much to be done. The army of Umbarra was nothing more than a disorderly, ragged mob. The officers were badly trained, and incompetent; the men bored with their work, and insubordinate. Of *esprit de corps* there was none, as might be expected, and the whole institution seemed to be looked upon as a joke and nothing more. It was a rabble playing at soldiers. To change all this seemed a work of impossibility. But Michael set to work, and put his best into the task. Mian Gul was a great help to him. This young man was a born soldier, and loved his work. With his aid Michael found men capable of being turned into useful officers, and new commands were given. The first great reform instituted was a uniform dress—grey turbans, grey blouses after the manner of the Afghan, grey silk drawers, and felt puttees. As it was paid out of the exchequer it was very popular with the men. Then Michael caused shooting ranges to be erected, and the science of musketry was taught. Prizes were offered later for competitions, and men became interested. Then team matches were organised, section shooting against section, company against company. The first seeds of *esprit de corps* were sown. Men liked to see their sections win, and, having won, liked them to excel in other things as well. Thus on the parade ground

they liked their unit to be considered best at foot-drill or rifle-drill.

One fact had come home to Michael from the very first—the country's love for horse-riding—and he did not lose sight of it. He founded a cavalry brigade. Recruits poured in. Nearly every man in the state desired to join. This scheme was especially prized by Nana Dun. It was a scheme after his own heart. If the tills of the exchequer were drained dry in buying the horses he would go on with it. And so money rained out, and horses rained in. Men were sent far and wide with their pockets bulging to buy of the best, and soon the cavalry brigade grew in numbers that were far beyond Michael's expectations. An army was arising in which the cavalry strength was equal to the infantry strength—a proportion that was wrong according to all precedent. But, then, it was popular in Umbarra, and that mattered a great deal. Also, it would be an army sufficient to deal with any petty tribal wars that might trouble them. And so Michael let things slide. One of the units of this cavalry brigade, with Nana Dun as its honorary chief, was equipped entirely with white horses. This unit was named "The White Horse of Umbarra." It was composed of two hundred of the very best horsemen to be found in the country. A special test was given to all those who entered it—a very exacting test—and many were ploughed. One of its chief rules was expulsion for any man thrown with his horse still standing. This regiment became the pride of Umbarra. When they passed through the town people left their work, and rushed to see them canter by with a jingling of spurs and

rattle of accoutrements. "There goes the white army of the sahib," they cried, and would give them a cheer. It became a proud distinction to be a member of such a unit. Men liked to say, "My regiment—the White Horse of Umbarra."

Michael, as commander of the army, like Nana Dun, only held an honorary command. Mian Gul was their actual leader, a command he prized as much as his life. It was good to see him cantering at their head—a fine figure of a man, upright upon his horse; with the look of an Alexander leading his troops to victory. He loved his work, and felt himself eternally bound to Michael for the appointment. The two became fast friends, and were inseparable. Subuhdar Pandy, after attending one or two meetings of the staff, retired to his bungalow outside the city walls. There he shut himself up, and remained away inactive and sulky. Michael tried his hardest to pacify the man's wounded pride, but pacification was abortive.

Of Hindoo he saw a great deal. The Mohammadan was interested in his work, and he was always popping into Michael's bungalow to chat with him. The more Michael saw of the man the more he admired him. There was a great brain behind his dark, sparkling eyes, but it lacked the fanaticism of the East. Here was a shrewd thinking machine, with almost the canniness of the Scot. The pros and cons of every action were studied again and again before the action was put into practice. No schemer this, either. He had his country's good at heart. Nana Dun was put into the background because of his inability to rule, and for no other reason. Under His Highness's free control Umbarra

would have slid back into the dark ages of civilization. The schemers and fanatics would have turned Nana Dun round their little fingers, and the state would have been overrun with tribal wars and internecine feuds. He was a great diplomatist, and a great diplomatist was wanted in a country like Umbarra.

He discussed Michael's plans with him, and with a clever man's intuition helped him more than once. Michael, during these interviews, essayed to find some answer to the question that still puzzled him, why of all men Hindoo should seek him out to do this work. But the question was always evaded and a smiling answer given: "Because you are the best man for the work, captain sahib."

Michael's hours of leisure were few, but now and again he snatched a few hours to himself, and he would ride out into the jungle with the faithful Harry as companion. It was on one of these expeditions that he had a presentiment that someone followed them. They were riding along a path cut through the giant tufted bamboo grass. The foliage screened the sun and cast them into shadow. Upon the sun-scorched road they had just left he saw the figure of a man silhouetted for a moment against the golden background. The next he had ridden into the jungle, but by another path. It was strange, he thought, that he had not noticed the man before. He had not been in sight when they rode upon the flat highway leading out of the town. Again, he had ridden this path many times, and had not met a solitary soul. Of course, the stranger might be out for a pleasure ride, as they were. Yes, surely that was it, and he dismissed

the thought of being followed from his head. Why should they wish to follow him? But the next time he rode out with the faithful Harry, the presentiment came to him again. Before they had ridden a mile upon their way, he saw a horseman appear half a mile ahead between a gap in the line of grasses. He watched closely as they rode, and presently he saw the man again. He recognised him as one of the men he had seen in Nana Dun's suite. He also made another discovery. The man was not alone. There were others with him. This evening, to the chagrin of Harry, he made an extra long ride. He rode to a part of the jungle which was well off the beaten track. Then, halting in the shadow of a great banyan tree, he waited and watched. His followers had not been shaken off. He saw them again, walking their horses, half a mile in the rear, along the fern-grown path he had just followed.

Why should they follow him? And then the truth came home to him. He was a prisoner. They did not wish him to leave Umbarra. These men who pursued his tracks had orders not to allow him across the frontier. It was a discovery that he meant to keep to himself. It might be useful in the future, and he turned and rode homewards with the nonchalance of one who has seen nothing unusual.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE REINSTATEMENT OF MIAN GUL

MICHAEL'S great discovery did not worry him. In the first place, he had half expected that he would be watched, and in the second, he had no present desire to leave Umbarra. He was living the life of a king. His quarters were the acme of comfort, the food and wine served perfection, and the work to hand after his own heart. And, the greatest thing of all, he was learning to forget. The pain of his being turned down by Dorothy was lessening. Perhaps in time it would leave him altogether.

His work of reform made good progress. The infantry were learning quickly, and he thought he saw signs of keenness in the men. As for the cavalry, that was a success from the day he asked for recruits. Yes, he really felt that he had done good. His employers were of the same opinion, too. Nana Dun was full of boyish delight at the progress of the cavalry. He would ride out with them and watch them drill, follow them when they went farther afield to do skirmishing and patrol work, and was never so happy as when, in the capacity of honorary colonel, he led them in a charge across the country with orders to silence an imaginary gun-post. Michael had given him a plaything that filled his hours with delight, and he was eternally grateful to Michael. He looked upon him as a genius of administrators. He had expected some improvement from Michael's training, but he had not expected a miracle. With a wave of

his magic wand Michael had transferred his ragged, undisciplined army into something to be proud of.

"I understand now the secret of the Guides," said he one evening as they rode back from manœuvres together. "With such men as you to train them, no wonder they are perfection. I once saw them march to a camp of exercise and I shall never forget it. The finest body of men I have ever seen, and they carried the look of conquerors in their eyes. If ever trouble comes to Umbarra I have no fear. My men will hold their own, and I shall have a lot to thank you for, sahib Michael."

One evening when Michael returned after a ride into the jungle he was surprised to find Mian Gul waiting for him. His commander of the White Horse had been given a *congé* of five days. Two of them were still to run.

"Good evening, Mian," said he. "What brings you back so soon?"

"I have had enough of holidays, sahib Michael."

"To hell with the sahib! Why this form of address when it's been Michael this and Michael that for the last fortnight? Aren't we the best of pals, Mian? What have I done to offend you?"

"I am no longer worthy to be called your friend."

"What tomfoolery is all this?"

Michael looked closer at his friend as one who is utterly confounded. And then he saw that a great change had come to him. He looked as though he had aged twenty years. There were lines upon his dark, handsome face, and a look of misery in his eyes. He crossed quickly to his side, and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Tell me, old man," said he. "What's the trouble?"

"I have come to say good-bye."

"Good-bye?" Again the look of puzzled surprise. "But why good-bye? What's to become of the White Horse? They will sink into oblivion without their beloved commander. You can't desert me like this. Just when I'm getting things ship-shape, too."

"It is all very well for the sahib to use the dissimulation of the East. Why not be frank, after the manner of your own countrymen? It will not hurt me more."

"Frank? Good God, Mian. Let's hear all about it. You'll drive me mad with your insinuations. I'm in the dark. I haven't the faintest idea what you're driving at."

Mian turned questioning eyes towards Michael after this outburst, then, shrugging his shoulders, looked away.

"But it is your order, sahib."

"Then for heaven's sake get on with it. Tell me all about it, unless you want me to go raving mad, and smash every bric-à-brac in the room."

"The glory of my life has been taken away," said Mian. "When they told me that you no longer wanted my services, that I was incapable as a leader of men, that another would be given my command, it was the death-blow to my pride. I came to say good-bye, for my path now lies in the ways of darkness."

Michael gasped.

"They told you these things?" he cried, pacing

up and down the room. "Then they lied, Mian. These orders did not come from me. I never issued them."

He came and stopped before the bent figure, and watched him pathetically. Mian looked up.

"This is the truth, sahib? You are not playing with me?"

"The honest, sober truth. I swear it in the name of my God."

Mian Gul rose as one dazed.

"Then you have not lost faith in me? You still think me worthy to lead the White Horse?"

"Of course, Mian. I could not have a better man."

"Then the name of Allah be praised! I live again, brother Michael. I do not care what the others think. Let them do as they wish. It was the thought that you had no faith in me that turned my life to ashes."

"There is some trickery here, Mian," said Michael. "I must get to the bottom of it."

"There is no trickery. I have long foreseen this. Jealousy is the cause of my dismissal. I am too much a favourite with the people. But I cannot understand why they dragged you into it. It was easy enough to get rid of me without lying. I am glad now I know that you do not think me incapable. I shall go away happy."

"Go away? Not you, Mian. You're going to stay here and help me in my work."

"You do not know Nana Dun. He is jealous and wants to get rid of me. I shall have to go; there is no way out. But I am glad I came to see you before I went. A great weight is lifted from my

heart. They tried to prevent me coming. Now I see clearly the reason. But I evaded them and made my way here unseen."

Michael fell to pacing the room again. The thought of losing his one real friend in Umbarra troubled him. There was no doubt that Nana Dun, or Hindoo rather, had decided that Mian was to go. There was probably a diplomatic reason for his dismissal. What could he do? What weight would his pleading for his friend have? Would they listen to him, a stranger within the gate? It was hardly likely. And yet he dreaded the thought of losing Mian's companionship. Presently he turned towards the chair where lay his discarded pith topi and riding switch.

"What are you going to do?"

The question came from Mian, who had been watching him closely.

"I am going to see Nana Dun immediately. Make yourself comfortable, my son, until I come back. And don't despair till I tell you myself that there is no hope."

Said Mian from the depths of his chair:

"If you work this miracle for me, Michael, I shall be your slave till the end of time."

His Highness Nana Dun was sitting in the cool of the evening air upon the great terraces of copper stone which surrounded his beautiful palace. Michael found him in an arbour, cool with the green foliage and deep purple flowers of the beautiful bougainvillea. A great hound—a Dane of pure breed—rose as he approached and growled a warning, but a word from Nana Dun sent him down upon his belly again by his master's feet.

"An unexpected visit," said His Highness. "But I am glad to see you at any time. Be seated."

Michael sat down upon a seat carved in the stonework, and wondered what line of action to take. He knew that a difficult task lay before him.

"You came at a time when I am generally being entertained by my dancers," said Nana Dun, "but to-night I felt stifled and came out here. You are lucky."

"I am lucky, your Highness."

"For the first time in my life I have realised how beautiful my palace is."

"Yes! It is very beautiful."

Michael turned his eyes to the terrace bathed in moonlight, and the fairy walls of the palace behind him, a glorious structure in white marble, with golden cornices and ivory-latticed windows, marble minarets and marble domes beyond; tier after tier of exquisite workmanship; a palace of dreams rising to meet the dark blue haze of night. Yes, it was very beautiful, and Nana Dun had not noticed it till to-night. It was characteristic of this boy of a man. He lived but for his horses and his polo. Other things in life were anathema. But yet to-night he had had an awakening, and Michael fell to wondering if ever the metamorphosis came, and this boy thought as a man, what effect it would have on all their destinies.

"There is some reason for your visit to-night, sahib. What is it?"

Michael awoke from his state of deep thought as Nana Dun's words fell on his ear.

"Yes, your Highness," said he. "It is concerning the misfortune that has come upon your cousin, Mian Gul."

"Mian Gul must go; there is nothing to be gained by your pleading for him, sahib."

He spoke with emphasis, and there was a look in his eyes as though he wished to avoid the subject.

"Let us talk of other things, sahib."

But Michael was not one to give up the struggle so easily.

"You must hear me out, your Highness," said he. "You have told me that you are well satisfied with my work. I do not think I have done badly. Your army now is something more than a name. It is developing into a force to be reckoned with. If you want the good work to continue you must not interfere with my appointments. I placed Mian Gul at the head of the White Horse because he was the best man to command them. If he goes I cannot answer for them. I honestly believe that they will disband immediately. They love their commander, and would give their lives for him."

"You think that?"

A troubled look came upon Nana Dun's face. The White Horse of Umbarra was his pride; he dreaded their disunion.

"I do not think, your Highness. I know. When the news is given out not a man of them will ride on to parade."

"By Allah! that must not be."

Hope rose in Michael's breast. He had played the right cards then. But Nana Dun's next words cast him back again into the depths.

"But Mian Gul must go. There are good reasons.

The Subahdar Pandy has given reasons that make it imperative."

Subahdar Pandy! The name caused Michael to start. His enemy, then, had been responsible for all this. The venom of his anger at being displaced was beginning to show itself in tangible form. He meant to upset Michael's plans, and cause him annoyance that way. Also, the use of his own name in the affair was at last understood. If Mian had gone away without first seeing him he would have gone away as his enemy. Michael changed his tactics.

"I hope you will not think me impertinent, your Highness," said he, "but I should like to hear what charge Subahdar Pandy laid against your cousin."

"It is one I have suspected all along," said Nana Dun. "Mian Gul is too popular with the people. It is not fitting for my pride that he should receive more plaudits when he goes abroad than I. Yet so it is. And one day it may be dangerous. One day I may wake to find myself no longer the ruler in Umbarra."

So that was it. Michael saw that the wily subahdar, to gain his own ends, had worked upon the susceptibilities of a weak man—a weak man who had not the brains to perceive that the accusation lacked substance. Mian Gul a traitor! The thought was ludicrous.

"Mian Gul would give his own life for you, your Highness," said Michael. "There is no more trustworthy man in the whole of Umbarra. The idea is ridiculous."

"I do not think so, sahib. I have for a long time had my suspicions."

"Subahdar Pandy is my enemy I am afraid, your Highness."

"Your enemy?"

"Yes. He has never forgiven me for coming here and taking his command from him. He is aiming at me when he sends Mian away. It will spoil the good work. And it will be years before we shall recover from the blow."

A look of a new understanding came into the *peshwa's* face.

"Then you think that the subahdar wishes to override you? You think that perhaps he only raised my fears so that I could do you an injury?"

"I am sure of it, your Highness."

"And you think Mian is to be trusted?"

It was the boy in the man again coming out. Michael had reassured him, as anyone, indeed, with an argument plausible enough could.

"I know Mian as my own brother," said Michael. "I am sure of him. He would rather that someone plunged a sword through his heart than rule over Umbarra a traitor to his cousin."

"I am glad that you think that. Mian shall be reinstated. I will write to him at once."

. . . . . .

When Michael returned with the precious letter written by His Royal Highness Nana Dun, Mian Gul was sitting out upon the verandah with the look of one who has forgone all hope. He looked up as Michael's footsteps sounded on the wooden flooring.

"You have come back to tell me that all is over?" said he. "That I must travel by the road that leads into darkness?"

Michael held out the sealed packet with the large red seal of Umbarra, and Mian Gul stared at it for a moment, not comprehending what it meant. Then, something in the other's face striking him, he took it and tore it open with trembling fingers. When he had read the letter through he jumped up with a glad cry, and, seizing Michael's hand, raised it to his lips.

"Allah shower blessings on you for this night's work," said he fervently. "You have plucked me from the depths of hell and placed me in the sunlight again."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

AN ARAB AND THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

Most Asiatics have the gift of hiding their feelings from their fellow men. With the fiercest anger raging within they will smile with the seraphic smile of an angel, where a white man would flare up and let his feelings be generally known in words. Subahdar Pandy subjugated his ill-feeling for Michael, and met him with the kindly look of "Let bygones be bygones. I for my part have forgotten all about it." But it was paradoxical. Underneath lay a burning hate, and a fierce desire to injure the man who in his opinion had been the cause of his downfall. But he kept it under control, and Michael imagined that the subahdar had forgiven him, and that things would henceforth run smoothly. But his fond hopes were one day dispelled, and he was given seriously to think. It was Hindoo who opened his eyes. The Mohammadan had come to his bungalow one morning very early, before he had yet risen, and, entering his bedroom, had sat himself down upon the end of the bed.

"Sahib," said he, "His Highness Nana Dun is causing me trouble."

Michael sat up quickly The words scared him.

"What do you mean by trouble, Hindoo?" said he.

"He's getting out of hand. He is not so easily influenced as he used to be."

"You mean you're losing your power over him?"

"Precisely."

"Have you any idea of the cause?"

"Yes. Subahdar Pandy is scheming against me."

"Then why not get rid of the subahdar?"

"I came to ask you do to that for me."

"I? Good heavens, Hindoo! How can I accomplish that which you, with all your hold on Nana Dun, have failed to do?"

"You said some time ago that our defences on the Wadiri frontier were weak and should be reorganised."

"Well?"

"Insist that these shall be strengthened at once. His Highness will agree. He has great faith in your advice. The man you will suggest for the work will be the subahdar."

"And Pandy out of the way, you will regain your influence?"

"Yes, and I shall take great care to keep it. This man forbodes no good to Umbarra. I have no tangible proof, but I suspect that he is working for a break with the British. He does not love them. He has never forgiven your Government for depriving him of his commission. Subahdar Pandy must be got out of the way as soon as possible. It would be a bad day for all of us if we found ourselves at war with the greatest nation in the world."

And, urging Michael to see the *peshwa* as soon as possible, he left him to his thoughts.

A break with the British Government! War with his own country! The suggestion caused Michael the greatest alarm. The presentiment that had come to him upon the yacht he had dismissed as a thing not to be thought of seriously, and here was the presentiment in danger of being realised. What

should he do in such an eventuality? He was a prisoner in the country, he was watched, and men were ready to ride him down if he attempted to escape. It was a difficult position, and his one hope was that the trouble would not materialise.

He lost no time in seeing Nana Dun, and for the second time his persuasions were listened to, and Subahdar Pandy was sent to inspect the defences on the Wadiri frontier. The man out of the way, he breathed again, but his reassurance was short lived. Some of the seed that the subahdar had sown was taking root, and he discovered it in this wise.

One evening he was returning from a ride, but without the faithful Harry this time. Half an hour's canter would bring him to the bungalow, and as the hour was late and the night air cold he was in a hurry to get back to the comforts of his snug abode. But the path he travelled was overgrown with giant grasses, and so thick with ferns and roots that it would have been suicide to go at any rate but a walk. When at last he made his way out of the jungle he breathed a sigh of relief, and was about to touch his horse with the spurs when he saw something which made him turn back again into the shadows. The spot he had come to was a prairie of coarse grass and sand, with a few scraggy trees here and there. It was a desolate place enough, the haunt of vultures and wild goats. But its history made it a place more to be avoided than its desolation. It was the execution ground. A great white stone reared its head skywards but a hundred paces from where Michael stood, and against this stone from time immemorial, those who had been condemned to death by the laws of Umbarra

were placed and shot. And now, when he rode out into the moonlight, Michael had seen a body of men drawn up in line, and a black object standing upright silhouetted against the stone. An execution was going to take place. Someone was going to suffer the extreme penalty. Another moment and he would have ridden right across the path of the firers. He drew back to wait till the mournful scene should be finished.

What manner of man was the condemned? What had he done? His long robe and hood bound round with cords and tufts of camel's hair proclaimed him an Arab. His face Michael could not see, for it was in shadow. His appearance was bold and resolute. He stood up against the background of stone as immovable as a statue. The command to load rang out short and sharp upon the still night air, but he did not flinch. A brave man was going the way of all men. Michael felt a great pity well up in his heart, and, fascinated at the deed to be enacted, he could not turn his eyes away.

Another order rang out—the order to present. The line of men raised their rifles, and still the man stood facing them bravely, without moving. Then suddenly he raised his hand and made the sign of the cross. Almost in the same moment a crash of sound woke the echoes as the rifles were fired, and the figure by the stone fell face forwards to the ground.

It was over, and Michael saw the squad of men fall in. Then the order to march rang out shrill and sharp on the night air. Slowly the squad disappeared from sight, and still Michael sat immovable upon his horse in the shadow of the grasses.

An Arab and a Christian. It was strange. He turned his horse homewards, and then, a thought striking him, he turned back again and rode across to the stone.

The Arab was lying upon his back, face upwards, and the hood had fallen clear of his features. Michael stood looking down upon the still, clear-cut features as they were revealed to him in the dazzling light of the moon. Then presently he dismounted, and, kneeling down beside the motionless figure, studied his face closely. Something in the man's looks puzzled him.

Suddenly, with deft fingers, he began to finger the Arab's clothing. He touched something hard and drew it forth. It was a pocket book, such as is carried by Europeans. With trembling fingers he opened it, and drew forth a small card. Then he uttered a cry of alarm, and the piece of pasteboard fluttered to the ground. He had read the owner's name and nationality: "Lieut. R. H. Henderson, Sussex Fusiliers."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

A MAD ADVENTURE

CYRIL VALENTINE, the most phlegmatic of valets, was actually moved to express emotion. A parcel had come. Its size and the name it bore upon the neat label suggested new clothes. That meant more room to be made in the wardrobe by removing suits partly worn and thus an addition to his own. So far so good. But then he opened the parcel and held up a garment with a cry of horror. It was a pair of corduroy trousers, stained and crumpled. He looked at the name on the label again. There was no mistake; it was addressed to the hon. B. Charters. He threw the offending garment from him as one who would be contaminated by its touch, and turned to the parcel again. It contained an old black coat, a cap—a terrible article in large vulgar check—and a coarse red handkerchief. Oh, horror of horrors! The sight of the things hurt the dainty taste of one steeped in knowledge of fashionable dress. Of course, his master was going to a fancy dress ball. But what awful taste. The things were too realistic. They smelt of the gutter. Why had not his master consulted him, as he generally did? He would have planned some gorgeous dress that would have been admired. But these! Why, the decent folk would run from him as though he were tainted. It was catastrophic. And the most phlegmatic of men lost his usual calm, and mumbled words that had never been known to leave his lips.

The hon. Bertie came upon him while he was mumbling swear words half under his breath.

"Why, what's the matter, Valentine?" said he, suspecting something amiss.

"It's these, sir," said the major-domo in a tone that intimated his disgust. "They must have been sent by mistake, sir."

The hon. Bertie glanced at the articles scattered upon the floor.

"There's no mistake, Valentine. I ordered them myself."

"No mistake, sir? Oh, I see. Fancy dress ball, sir?"

"Fancy dress ball be damned!" said the hon. Bertie. "I have my own reasons for ordering that outfit, and those reasons are a secret, Valentine, so put the things where I can find them, and don't remove a speck of mud or there will be trouble."

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The clocks of the city were striking the hour of midnight when a man came out of a house in Jermyn Street and made his way into Piccadilly, a navvy by appearance, but a very dirty one, with a large red handkerchief tied about his neck. It was the hon. Bertie Charters.

A policeman standing on the corner of Bond Street cast suspicious eyes in his direction, but let him go unmolested. Perhaps he was satisfied that articles for house-breaking could not be hidden in clothes that were tight to bursting point, or in pockets that did not bulge. Anyway, he let him go, and the hon. Bertie, unconscious that the eyes of the law were upon him, passed along Piccadilly, and, coming presently to Hyde Park Corner, turned

into Park Lane. A few hundred paces brought him to a high wall, covered with creepers growing in the garden beyond. Here he slowed down, and watched a taxi on the look-out for a late fare crawl past. Then, when it had receded into the distance, and the lane was deserted, he turned quickly and, making a running jump at the wall, caught wildly at the creeper. A shower of leaves, bruised fingers, and a fall upon the pavement was his reward. But a second attempt was more successful. His hands caught upon firmer material, which held his weight, and slowly and laboriously he drew himself up. For a moment he sat motionless upon the top of the wall. Then, with a hasty glance back into the deserted street, he dropped into the garden beyond.

. . . . . .

Jahannarra was dreaming—dreaming of India and of Michael Hepburn. She was back in her uncle's house again in Umbarra, in her own little room, that dearly beloved bower with its beautiful walls of tinted marble, and its quaint ivory-latticed windows. She was standing by a desk, and held a photo in her hand. It was a picture of Michael; it seemed to her that it was the greatest treasure she possessed. And then suddenly a shadow fell across the floor, and turning, she saw a man enter by the latticed windows and slowly advance towards her. She knew his purpose at once—it was to take her treasure from her. But to her horror she could not move. Her limbs were paralysed. Nearer he came; she saw his fingers grip upon the edge of the photo, and then it was gone.

The reality of the dream woke her. She lay for a moment motionless, her eyes fixed on the French windows of her room, which were open to let in the fresh night air. The moonlight poured through the opening in fairy beams of dancing light, but showed no figure of a man standing there, as she had expected. It was a dream then, after all. Her relief was great. She was about to turn over and seek sleep once more when she caught sight of a dark shadow in the centre of the room. She sat up now, thoroughly awake. There was a man in the room, after all, and he was standing by her desk. His presence must have influenced her subconscious state, and been the cause of her dream.

But Jahannarra was not lacking in courage. She did not give vent to wild screams, or hysterics, after the manner of so many of her sex. She calmly reached out her hand to the electric switch. The next moment the room was flooded with light. She caught sight of a small man shabbily dressed, his face hidden by the peak of a cap drawn down over his eyes. But it was only momentary, for with the coming of the light the stranger had taken to his heels and disappeared through the open windows into the night. Jahannarra rang the bell by her side, and, jumping out of bed, slipped into a pretty kimono of dazzling colours. Then she crossed to the desk. A necklace of pearls and diamonds lay upon the blotting pad, where she had hastily cast them as she disrobed. She uttered a cry of surprise. She had expected to see them gone. Her rings were there, too. The thief must have left them in his fright. What a relief! It was careless of her, of course, to leave such treasures

lying about, but it was a warning. She would lock them up another time. She was about to turn away from the desk when suddenly she missed something that had been there when she went to bed. With quick fingers she turned over the papers that lay littered about, and searched the drawers, but without result. She was thus engaged when her old ayah, her eyes heavy with sleep, came in answer to her ring.

"What is it, Jehan?" she asked anxiously, shivering in the draught from the open windows. "What has happened?"

"There has been a thief in my room, Shana," said Jahannarra quietly. "Warn the servants. He went out through the windows a second or two ago. Get them to search the grounds."

A cry of alarm from the lightly clad ayah.

"A thief? How terrible!"

She turned to fly and give the alarm.

"One moment, Shana," said Jehan. "Before I went to sleep I placed a letter upon the writing desk here."

"A letter?"

"Yes, it was addressed to the sahib Captain Hepburn. Did you take it?"

"And why should I take my little one's letters?"

"Well, go, warn them quickly. I am afraid he will be miles away by now. But he may still be hidden in the grounds. And I should be happy if this man was caught."

The frightened ayah rushed from the room, calling in a loud, piercing voice that thieves were hiding to kill her mistress, and Jahannarra turned to the desk again.

"A man comes into my room where jewellery worth thousands of pounds is lying about," she mused. "He leaves a fortune and takes instead a letter addressed to a captain sahib in India. It is very, very puzzling."

She sat down to await the result of the search in the garden. If they could only find the intruder perhaps she would learn the solution of the mystery. The whole affair was baffling, and with a woman's curiosity she longed to fathom it. But her hopes were not gratified, for the ayah returned presently to say that a thorough search had been made and the thief had disappeared.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

CINDERELLA IS DISCONSOLATE

"Do you think the prince will come now, auntie?" The girl looked from her aunt to the vacant place that was laid at the head of the table, and seemed to be on the point of bursting into tears. "I do miss him so, auntie. Do you think he has forgotten us?"

"I think so, Dulcie. He did not come to the theatre yesterday, and he has not come to-night as he promised."

"But he may be detained. Hundreds of things may have turned up to keep him away. Princes are so busy, you know."

"But he would have sent us a message, Dulcie."

"Oh, he's probably told one of his courtiers, and the fellow's forgotten. He won't half cop it when the prince finds out."

"My dear, where did you get that awful phrase from? Little girls must not say 'cop it.'"

"The prince used it. And what's good enough for princes is good enough for me."

"Dulcie dear, I don't believe it."

"He did, then. I told him I wanted him to marry you as I was too young, and he said I wasn't to tell you that or I'd cop it."

Margery Manners was thankful for the twilight which hid her blushing cheeks.

"I'd rather you didn't use the phrase, dear," said she. "Princes are privileged, and can say what they like."

"Oh, very well, auntie. But I do wish he'd come. It will be awfully lonely without him."

"I don't think I should worry about the prince, darling. I'm sure he won't come."

"Oh, you horrid thing, to say that. I'm sure he will. Why, there he is."

A motor had driven up to the door, and its engine was humming noisily outside. She ran to the window and peered out eagerly. Presently she returned, and the tears were nearer than ever.

"It's only the fat lady that lives next door. Oh, auntie, I'm awfully miserable."

Margery Manners rose and laid a gentle hand upon her shoulder.

"Cheer up, Dulcie," said she kindly. "I've just sold a story to one of the editors, and when he sends a cheque we'll have a ripping time together."

"But it won't be ripping without the prince," said a tearful little voice.

"You must try and forget him, dear."

"Oh, but I shan't—never, never, never. He's my prince, 'cause I found him first. And I don't believe that he's gone away for good. It's wicked of you to suggest such a thing."

"I'm afraid your prince is a humbug, Dulcie. Most princes are, you know."

"Oh, that's horrider and horrider. I'm sure he's not a humbug. And I don't believe you care a bit for him, else you wouldn't say such a thing."

"Well, I shan't break my heart over him. I don't care enough for that."

"Oh, that's a big wapping fib, auntie, and you know it."

"Dulcie, dear!"

"You say you don't care. Then why do you keep his photo in your room? And why did I catch you crying over it last night when I peeped in at your door, and you thought I was asleep?"

Margery Manners, confused and agitated, rose to her feet. She was about to speak, then, thinking better of it, turned and left the room. The girl watched her go, then, bursting into tears, sank down at the table with her head buried in her arms. For some time she lay thus, her shoulders heaving, and presently looked up with tear-stained little face.

"Dear God," she muttered, "do please send back my prince, 'cause we had such jolly times together. And do not be offended by auntie's terrible fib and keep him away for a penance. She did not mean it. She does care for him, really and truly. And please send him back to-morrow, 'cause he promised to take me to Peter Pan in the afternoon, and I do so want to see it. And if you listen to my prayer I'll be ever such a good little girl for ever and ever. Amen."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE RETURN OF JAHANNARRA

THE return of Jahannarra was like a new lease of life to Michael Hepburn. He had of late been worried. The shooting of the Englishman had given him seriously to think. When native states commence the murdering of white men it is time to look out for coming trouble. It means that they have thrown down the mailed glove indeed, for such offences are punishable by war. This had been no accident. It had been deliberately planned. And those that planned it evidently were prepared to pay the piper. If news of the affair leaked back to the British Government a punitive expedition would be sent against Umbarra. That meant war, for Michael said that the men whom he had trained were good for a stout defence. No untrained rabble this, but an army, with knowledge of arms, and first-class weapons to hand. Yes, they would put up a good defence. He knew that a small detachment—perhaps a company or two—would be sent at first. It was generally so, and these would be cut up. Then a larger one would be sent. It would be war to the knife. And he would be a prisoner while his own countrymen were fighting. It was too galling to think of. Yes, he was considerably worried. And then came Jehan. She burst upon him one morning very early, when he was writing in the cool air upon the verandah of his bungalow.

He was deeply absorbed in his work when a whistling fell upon his ear. Surprised, he looked up.

"Hallo!" he cried. "Who the devil's there?"

The purple blossoms of a bougainvillea near by parted and a merry face peeped out.

"Peep-bo, Michael sahib!" said a merry voice.

And with a glad cry of "Jehan" he jumped to his feet.

"Good-morning, captain sahib," said she, coming forth and shaking the purple stars from her hair. "May I come up?"

"I don't think it is quite correct, Jehan," said he very seriously. And then, with a laugh, "Come up. I'm jolly glad to see you."

She was dressed for riding. She wore the picturesque dress of the native—large blue plush drawers to the ankle, with a cloth of gold brocade about her breast—and Michael, as he looked down upon her handsome dark face, with its eyes of sparkling blue, thought that she was the most beautiful Asiatic he had ever seen. With a gay laugh she leapt up the wooden stairs that led up from the compound, and threw herself into a chair.

"It is great to get back to my own beloved country again," said she. "I was very miserable in that land of eternal rain, and I missed the sun, and I missed my horses, and I missed you, Michael sahib."

She laid great emphasis upon "And I missed you," and there was a coquettish look in her eyes, but Michael did not see it.

"And now you have got the sun, and the horses, and your poor servant you are happy. It is good."

She looked keenly at him while he spoke, and with a woman's keen perception noticed a change.

"But what is wrong with my captain sahib?"

said she. "He looks tired and sad. I believe they have neglected him, and given him too much work to do. I shall be very cross and have all this altered. My Uncle Pandy shall urge His Highness to give you a holiday. We will spend it together, Michael sahib. Would not that be very jolly? And we will ride, and I will show you all the beauties of my beautiful country, and when you are tired I will get my banjo and play sweet music to you. Shall it not be good to live like that for a time?"

"It would be very nice, Jehan, but I'm afraid His Highness will not think the same as you. Anyway, it will pass. I shall buck up no end now you have returned."

It was at this moment that, unperceived to both of them, Harry Hawkins appeared in the doorway of one of the living rooms. He carried the inevitable pair of boots in his hands. When he saw Jehan, a look of dismay came into his usually smiling face, and he dropped one of the boots.

The noise of the falling footwear made them both turn.

"Hallo, Harry!" said Michael. "What's the trouble now?"

"Sorry, sir. The sight of the lady came as a bit of a surprise. It took me all of a 'eap, so to speak. 'Ence the faus-par of dropping this 'ere boot."

He picked it up, and wiped it deferentially with a silk handkerchief.

"Breakfast's up. Two eggs—both good 'uns—and a juicy rasher. Shame to keep it waiting, sir."

"I'll be with you in a moment, Harry." And then, turning to Jahannarra, "I must apologise

for Harry. He's a bit rough in his speech, but he's a jewel of a fellow otherwise."

Jahannarra cast a pair of twinkling eyes in Harry's direction.

"Of course," she said sweetly. "I could tell that at once. You Englishmen carry your hearts in your face. And Harry's is pure gold."

With a cry of "Stow it, miss," Harry bashfully withdrew. But in the shadow of the doorway, where he was unseen by either of them, he shook his fist in Jehan's direction, and went his way, scowling like a driven bear.

This was Michael's first meeting with Jehan, but many were to follow. Michael no longer went out alone or with Harry as companion now. Jahannarra always accompanied him. She rode like a true daughter of a race that learned horse-riding from their cradle days. Nothing was too fierce for her. The most unruly beast she could sit like a master. And Michael enjoyed her company, her merry talk, and infectious laughter. The trouble that hung over him lost its terrors, and he regained his cheerful manner.

There were many meetings. Jehan was often in the compound. In an arbour, surrounded by foliage gay with blossom, she would recline in a cushioned chair and play and sing. To the twanging of her banjo she would indite an English song in a clear and well-trained voice. And so Jehan the coquette cast her spell over Michael, and he was rapidly falling in love.

There was only one thing to mar these *tête-à-têtes*, and that was the extraordinary behaviour of one Harry Hawkins. He seemed lately obsessed with

the notion that his master was to be worried with all sorts of questions, both material and immaterial. And he was always poking his head into the arbour at inopportune moments. He would come silently, that was the worst of it, and, most obstinate of fellows, would not take his master's hint that such queries could await another time in future. Michael felt that Harry was getting a touch of the sun. He broached the subject one day, and was met with an indignant outburst.

"Me? The sun? Lor' bless you, sir, why, I could sit out when the sun's at its 'ottest, and never blink. I ain't lived down in the plains, done a twelve miles' march with full kit, and come in as fresh as a daisy for nothing. No sun'll get me, sir."

And Michael left the interview wondering what other cause there could be for his servant's strange behaviour.

One day Jehan met him in the compound with a sad face.

"What is it, little lady?" he asked anxiously. "There is something wrong?"

"Yes," said she, playing with a large red rose she held in her hand. "I am to come here no more."

"Why? What's happened, Jehan? What's to prevent you?"

"Uncle Pandy. He is my guardian. He has heard that I am often with you, and he has forbidden me to come or see you again. I am very sad, Michael sahib. I dare not disobey him. By the laws of my country I could be punished severely. They might even kill me. But I do not think Uncle Pandy would be so cruel as that. No, I'm afraid it is to be good-bye."

"Good-bye? That is very terrible, Jehan. What am I to do without you?"

"It will be far more terrible for me, Michael sahib. My visits to you have become the joy of my life. Without them all will be darkness and tears."

"I must have this out with your uncle, Jehan," said Michael desperately. "I will find a way out. Surely, if these laws exist, they would not put them into practice."

"We are a race of barbarians," she said in a voice close on tears. "Uncle Pandy is little better than a wild man. I am afraid of him at times."

The clatter of horse's hoofs upon a hard road came to them. Michael glanced at Jehan and saw her tremble. Then, with a quick movement, she flung her arms about his neck, and kissed him passionately She clung to him for a second, and then was gone. He was standing alone with a large red rose in his hand.

It was at this moment that he heard a horseman ride up to the gate of the compound, and turning, he saw himself face to face with Subahdar Pandy.

"Good-morning, captain sahib," said he with a low bow. Then, his eyes fixed upon the rose Michael held:

"I find you alone, eh?" said he, with a look of cunning. "Or is someone hidden in the shrubbery?"

He walked forward and looked into the arbour close. Finding the place deserted, he returned.

"I am glad we are alone," said he, looking keenly at Michael, "for that which I have to say to you is for your ears alone."

"Then say your say, subahdar," said Michael coldly. "There is no one by to listen."

"I come from His Highness to summon you to a meeting, captain sahib. A council of war."

"A council of war?" said Michael with surprise, for he had expected that the man came to speak of Jahannarra.

"Yes, a council of war, to be held at the palace at eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

There was evil in the look that the subahdar cast at Michael.

"You are not surprised then, sahib?" he asked.

"I am not surprised, subahdar," said Michael. "And you can tell your master that I will be there."

Subahdar Pandy swung himself into the saddle.

"If you will take a word of advice, captain sahib," said he, "you will get out of Umbarra as quickly as possible. It is not safe at present for an Englishman."

Then, setting spurs to his horse, he cantered away down the road that led to the town.

Michael watched him go. The blow had fallen, then. War was imminent—war against his own country probably. To-morrow at the council of war he would learn all. He stood on the threshold of great happenings, and the coming of another dawn would bring him face to face with his destiny

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE COUNCIL OF WAR

THE city of Umbarra was throbbing with life and movement when Michael entered it on his way to the palace. The street through which he rode was narrow, and the houses built of stone, but stone exquisitely carved after the manner of the East, with carvings and cornices of fairy-like workmanship overhanging the street. A sea of dazzling colour met his eye—satins and silks of all the colours of the rainbow—and dark faces peered up at him as he made his way cautiously for fear of riding a man down. Cries of "The captain sahib! Allah bless thee!" greeted him, and a way was made for him to pass. At the corner of the bazaar a crowd of fakirs, dressed in gaudy rags, with bells that jingled as they went, all but ran under the feet of his horse. They greeted him with "Alms, alms, in the name of Allah!" He threw them a few coins, and rode on with their blessings ringing in his ears. In the bazaar groups of buyers stood round piles of merchandise laid out upon the stone flags of the street. Raucous voices yelling prices and extolling the quality of their wares fell upon his ear. Here and there he saw a tailor sitting crossed-legged and stitching material of brilliant hue, or an old man sitting amidst metal pottery busy with his hammer.

He passed near a stall glittering with beads and shimmering stones, a young Parsi in charge, a strangely dressed figure in white ducks and an English morning-dress coat, upon his head a weird

looking hat resembling a flower bowl that could be used either way up. He greeted Michael deferentially.

"Greetings, son of the great white rulers," he cried. "Thy servant and his servants will bless thee evermore if you keep peace in Umbarra. The priests cry from the highways that you will save our people. Keep us from war, captain sahib, for war will bring ruin and famine."

"And loss of rupees," said Michael with a laugh.

"And it is the said rupees that make life worth living," the Parsi laughed back, understanding his drift. "The coming of rupees to Umbarra has brought civilisation, and civilisation has brought prosperity. There is a lot to be said for the rupee. No, captain sahib. Save us from war. The people are against it—those that are of understanding, like your servant—and look to you to save them."

"I am a man whose profession is war, but I am a counsellor of peace," said Michael, and rode on.

The bruit of the pending catastrophe had reached the people then, and, incongruity of incongruities, they looked to him to save them. Was ever man in such a quandary?

At the palace gates his horse was led from him by willing hands, and he was conducted within.

The council chamber was a spacious room, with walls in mosaic of black marble, and a large gilded dome. The morning sun streamed in through a hundred tiny latticed windows cut irregularly in the walls, and carved in beautiful tracery from snow-white ivory. In the centre of the room was a long table of shining ebony, and seated round this table in chairs of the selfsame material, heavily

cushioned, were men whom Michael had come to know during his sojourn in Umbarra. Hindoo was there, looking very worried; Mian Gul, rapping impatiently upon the table; Subahdar Pandy, with an expression of triumph upon his dark savage face, and many others. At the farther end of the table, upon a dais, with attendants gathered round him fanning the air with large peacock's feathers, lay Nana Dun.

He was dressed in all the gorgeous finery of an Eastern potentate. Robes of the finest silk hung from his shoulders to the floor—robes of vivid colours and studded with jewels. The turban upon his head was alive with flashing diamonds. He seemed bored with the task that lay before him, and looked as though he would rather be again in his European kit, out in the fresh air with his horses.

Michael approached the dais, made his obeisance, and then quietly took the one vacant chair that remained. The last member had arrived; the council was all present. At a sign from His Highness the peacock-feather bearers withdrew. There was a rustling of papers. Then Subahdar Pandy rose to his feet with a sheaf of manuscript in his hand.

"May the blessing of Allah be with us in our judgments," said he. "His Highness has called us here to-day to weigh great arguments A letter has been received. It has come from the Amir of Wadiri. I shall not read the letter. It was written from one great chief to another, and it is not meet that we, his poor servants, should pry into the confidences of our lords. His Highness has instructed me with the contents. It appears the Amir is in trouble. The British Government has

ordered a punitive expedition against his country. He calls upon his brothers to help him. The reward he offers is great: all that fertile land from Settra to the banks of the Amandi—a hundred square miles of country rich in pasture and minerals. He will hand all this over to Umbarra if we take the field—a rare prize that would bring fortunes into an exchequer that is not over-rich. I have spoken. It is for you, the counsellors of our lord, to decide."

He sat down amid a buzz of excitement. He had cast a bombshell into the council. Voices rose into babble, discussing the pros and cons, and then were as suddenly hushed again as Hindoo Khan rose to his feet with the light of battle in his eye.

"Your Highness," said he, "I am an old man, but I am young in wisdom. For twenty years I have been your right-hand man, and you have never once found fault with my counselling. Nor have I ever given advice that has proved wrong. Treat this offer as you would a snake with venomous sting, and stamp it into the floor with your heel. There is poison in it—poison that will work its deadly devastation upon Umbarra and your people. You go out to fight against the greatest nation in the world. You cannot hope to beat them. They will send one expedition; perhaps you will wipe that out. Then others will be sent, and if needed still others. Their numbers are legion. As well send an army of ants to fight the waters of the great Amandi. War is a terrible thing, even to the victor. It means the casting on to the dung-heap the wealth that has been accumulated through the toil and travail of the people. Look to history for a moment. What were we in Umbarra before the coming of the

British? A people savage and wild, who fought for the love of fighting. When our people—those wild Pathans who first gave civilization to our country—swarmed out of the plains of Afghanistan and the mountains beyond, and settled in Umbarra, they ruled by the knife. And it is written that he who rules by the knife shall die by the knife. For many years Umbarra was a wilderness—war, always war, and the terrible trail that war leaves, starvation, and pestilence, and ruin. No man could think himself safe, or call his home his own. And then came the British, and with them the seeds of peace. Men began to learn that war is suicide. Men began to see that the prosperity of a country is contained in the work of its people. 'Sow and you shall reap' is written in the Christian law, and it is the wise saying of a wise man. But war sweeps the garnerings of a people into dust in the passing of a night. Men learnt the wise teachings of the British, and prosperity came. Our people ceased to fight, and turned instead to the land. They sowed and they reaped, and their bins stood full with corn. Starvation and its terrors became a thing of the past. We learnt other things from our white befrienders. We, with but the wisdom of little children, were awed by the superior civilization of the British. They brought us the steam-engine, and bridged our rivers, and built our roads. They stamped out disease for us. Men, women, and children were dying in thousands, often in the most piteous agony. They gave us drugs to stay their pain, and saved thousands from a horrible death. Was not that a great thing to do? Should we not be grateful to this race, who brought us from the dark ages into the light of the new? And

it is against these people that we, with our puny knowledge, would go out to fight. I tell you that to take such a step would be a wicked thing to do. We should return again to the bad times when our people were but savages. War breeds lust for war. If we were victorious it would not suffice. Other wars would follow. And, as surely as Allah is great and just, internecine feuds would spring up in their wake and lay the country in red ruin. Our people would be homeless, their houses but so many smoking piles. Starvation, with all its horrors, would fall upon man, woman, and child, and strew the desert places with corpses for the vultures' food. Disease and pestilence would go stalking once again, and fill the empty streets with cries of agony. This is no fancy imagining by an old man. I tell you such things will be if you go to war with those who have made us what we are. Beware before you give your counsels. If your cry is war, then assuredly you will cast Umbarra into tribulation."

He sat down amidst a great silence. His word-picture had taken effect. Those present were looking on the aftermath of war, and saw its most piteous side. Nana Dun lay back upon the soft cushions of his divan with a look of gloom upon his face. He had looked on the best side of war—the marching of men, the music of the drums, the charging of the glorious cavalry, the flying enemy, and the loot. And now Hindoo had opened his mind to things that he could not foresee for himself. It was a terrible picture that had been painted, and he feared that these things should come to pass. It was the subahdar, rising to his feet, that broke the spell. All eyes were turned to him. He was smiling

contemptuously, and cast a finger scornfully in Hindoo's direction.

"There spoke the faint of heart," said he. "Why should these terrible things predicted by Hindoo come upon us? I, for my part, see a victorious end Is it not a slur upon our people that Hindoo here should value their fighting powers so little? We come from the Pathan stock, and such stock is of the finest fighting material in the world. Moreover, they are trained; they have been taught the science of fighting. In days gone by they have fought and won when they were but little children in the fighting art. Now that they are trained, and have the most modern arms, I tell you they will not fail. We shall go to victory, and gain all the good that victory brings. We shall drive the *feringhis* away."

A voice cried from the midst of the councillors:

"Let us go out against the *feringhis*. Allah will help us," and other voices took it up.

Michael looked across to Hindoo. The old man sat with a look of dejection upon his handsome face. Things were going against him.

"We shall become the possessors of a rich new territory," continued the subahdar with a look of exultation in his eyes. "We shall enrich our exchequers a hundredfold. Our lord and master, a mighty king, will gain the blessing of his people, and his name will go down the ages as one who brought increase to his country by the sword."

Michael glanced towards the dais. Nana Dun was sitting up, and his gloom had disappeared. His vanity had been appealed to by the wily Pandy. The aftermath of war painted by Hindoo was forgotten. His Highness saw himself victorious, and

already heard the cries of his people welcoming him as a mighty conqueror.

"The weak, who sit idly by and do nothing, never gain the riches of the world. Are we, then, a weak nation? Is our master a weak king? No; I would take my sword and strike the man who laid those accusations dead at my feet. We are of the strong. And it is the strong and fearless who bring prosperity to their country. Let us go forth with our brothers the Wadiri against the *feringhis*. We shall beat them, and ride over their dead bodies to a victory that will bring glory to our country."

He sat down, and the room was filled with excited cries. He had expressed the desires of those gathered about the table. They wanted war, and they shouted for war until the room was filled with sound. A cry went up for silence. The *peshwa* had risen from his dais and stood looking down upon them with one hand raised.

"We have yet to hear the captain sahib," said he, when the cries had subsided. "Let us hear what one of the brothers of those we go out to fight has to say."

A great silence fell upon the room, and all eyes were turned to Michael. He sat drumming his fingers upon the table before him, but his brain was actively thinking. In but a few moments he must plan his whole course of action. Upon his words now depended his future destiny. He saw that the meeting was for war practically to a man. His own conscience prompted him to rise and rate them all for fools, to tell them that they went out to certain destruction. That would be telling them the truth. But it would gain little. He would be taken, and

cast into the cells of the prison-house. On the other hand, it would be a traitorous thing to do to urge them to go to war with his own country. He sat there drumming his fingers nervously upon the table as one in the dark. Those present began to get impatient. There were cries for the captain sahib. For a few moments he sat inactive, and then a ray of light came to him. There was one way out. It was desperate indeed, but then he was desperately placed. The idea that had come to him might succeed, but it was more likely to fail. Anyway, it would give him an active part in the impending struggle, and that would be more useful than being thrown trussed into a dark and danksome cell. He rose to his feet.

"I am for war," said he.

A great cry of joy went up. He glanced towards Hindoo, and saw that the old man had sunk back huddled up in his chair. It seemed to him that his face had aged considerably. He averted his eyes.

"I am for war," Michael continued. "Given a wise leader, the army of Umbarra should be successful. I speak with authority, for I have served with the men whom you go out to fight, and know their strength. But you must go into this affair with all your might. Do not look upon the *feringhis* as too easy a prey. I who know their secrets can lead you to victory. You ask me why I offer to do this thing for you? My answer is that they have not treated me kindly. They hounded me out of their army and sent me into the gutter to starve. You can understand, then, how my love has grown to hate. Yes, I hate these *feringhis* as much as you do whom they have trodden down under their feet

and you can give me no greater joy than to send me out to fight them. The revenge that my soul craves for is in sight. Make me your leader, and I will lead you to victory."

A great cheering filled the room when Michael finished his speech. "The captain sahib prophesies victory. Allah rain blessings on him," cried some. Others, "Let it be war, as the captain sahib says," and others, "The captain sahib shall save Umbarra. Have not the holy men spoken?" A torrent of sound dinned into Michael's ear, and he sat as one dazed. Had he done right? Would the thing he had planned succeed, or end in dismal failure? Subahdar Pandy's voice fell upon his ear.

"And now I will put it to the council," said he. "Those that are for war will rise to their feet."

There was but one who did not rise. Hindoo still sat huddled up in his chair like one stricken down with the palsy.

"It is well," said Nana Dun, looking down from the dais. "The council is for war. I will send greeting to my brother the Amir, and tell him that we march to his help."

Once again cheers of excited men broke forth, and then the solitary seated figure rose.

"This is an evil thing you do," said he, "and it will bring ruin to Umbarra."

He tottered like a sick man to the door, and then, turning, pointed a trembling finger to Michael.

"Look upon that man," said he in a broken voice. "I once loved him as a son. There is nothing that I would not have done for his good. I took him from the dung heap, and placed him in the midst of luxury. And he has rewarded the kindnesses of

an old man by breaking his heart. He has spoken. My love has turned to hate. Yes, captain sahib, I spurn thee as I would a poisonous snake. I shall retire to a hermit life under the cover of my own roof, and pray Allah that I may never look upon your face again."

And turning his back upon those in the room, he walked slowly away. It seemed to Michael, as he watched the bent shoulders disappear through the doorway, that he had lost the help of the one he most needed, and that his position was desperate indeed.

CHAPTER THIRTY

I AM A SOLDIER, BUT MUST PERFORCE TURN DIPLOMATIST

THE news of the coming war soon became known to the people of Umbarra. The soldiers greeted it with joy, for work of which there had been long abstinence was promised them. The merchants in the bazaar greeted it with sorrow, for to them it meant loss of trade and ruin. The peaceful citizen growled his disapproval, for his home was threatened. The beggar huzzaed his pleasure, for it meant a chance to loot. And the soldiers' quarters gave forth singing and laughter, for those who dwelt there were happy at the thought of a successful campaign, and the quarters of the merchants in the bazaar became silent, for they saw the rupees gained by so much hard saving tossed like dirt into the gutters, and who can laugh and shout when his heart is sad? But when eventually the news leaked out that the war was against the British, those that had been stricken down by the thought of war were sadder men still, for they knew that it spelt an end to them and theirs. Had they not seen it happen to other states? Had they not seen villages and towns smoking up to heaven—the punishment dealt out by the white man? This same tragedy would happen to them. The soldiers, too, lost some of their gaiety when they learnt what a doughty opponent they had to face.

Those who voted for war little knew the temper of the people. One man—a wise old man—knew,

and he had warned them in the council. But when fools listen the words of the wise are wasted. And so Hindoo retired, as he said he would in the council room, and shut himself in his own bungalow, a bungalow furnished comfortably in the English fashion, with large easy chairs and suites of furniture such as one might see in any country house in England. And this, perhaps, was not to be wondered at in one who had apotheosised everything British ever since he lived with a colonel sahib whom he had loved as a brother. Here, with his books, of which he had a large collection, and a few of his servants, he commenced his hermit life. Perhaps he did not wish the people of Umbarra to see a broken heart written on his face. For his heart was broken. A lover of his country, he saw it face to face with ruin. A diplomatist who had worked for forty years, and given of his best in his country's good—he saw that work threatened in a night. A land that had become prosperous and flourishing under his wise rule was about to be plunged into blood, and fire, and famine.

Alone in his study, with its rows of well-bound books, he sat and hardly moved from his chair. The tragedy that threatened seemed to have robbed him of movement. It might have been a dummy sitting huddled up to anyone looking in through the French windows that opened out into a compound full of palms. But an observer, if he had waited long enough, might have perceived that the old man was listening, always listening, as though he expected the coming of someone he wished to see. The slightest sound in the compound without would cause him to turn eyes filled with expectancy

towards the windows, and when no one came a look of disappointment would fill the face that had aged within the last few days.

One evening he sat with a copy of the Koran opened upon the table before him. He was not reading ; his eyes were fixed upon the closed shutters of the windows, and his mind upon the faint sounds that came to him from time to time from the world without. For hours he sat thus, when suddenly there fell a faint knocking upon the wooden panelling of the shutters. In a moment he was on his feet. The spell of his inactivity seemed to pass, and he crossed the room like a man reborn. In a second the shutters were thrown wide and the windows opened. A man stepped into the room, a tall man with the square build of the soldier.

" My son," said Hindoo, in a voice of emotion, " I have waited for this hour for many weary days. Why have you not come before ? "

Michael Hepburn threw his pith topi and switch into a chair and seated himself upon a soft divan.

" You speak a paradox, Hindoo," said he. " You say you have waited for my coming, and yet at the council you prayed Allah that you might never see my face again."

" Those words were spoken for a purpose, captain sahib. They were a blind for all those that listened save one man. I hoped he would read the riddle."

" And that man was blind, Hindoo. He did not read the riddle. But he is a greatly relieved man at this present minute, I can tell you. I thought I had lost your friendship, Hindoo, and that is the last thing in the world I can afford to lose."

"When you spoke in the council you had a plan. I am not an old fool, captain sahib. You deceived them all, but not me. If you will have the condescension your servant would value your confidence."

"I am a soldier and perforce must turn diplomatist," said Michael with a laugh. "You know the story of the Settra kidnapping?"

"You speak of events that one would like to forget, captain sahib."

"What exactly happened, Hindoo?"

"It is a story, my son, that is very pitiful," said Hindoo with lowered voice. "But since you have heard a part of the truth it would be well to let you know the whole. Twenty years ago the men of Wadiri made a raid. I was but the servant of Nana Dun in those days. I listened to his orders and obeyed them. No more. The time was not yet come when I was wise enough to counsel him and bend him to my will. If that had been, this thing would not have happened. Well, these wild men of the hills made a raid by night into the village of Settra. They came silently, as men bent upon an evil errand, and they did their foul work and left as silently. The next morning a horseman rode into the village, and was stricken with horror at the sight that met his eyes. The streets were filled with the dying and the dead. He rode back whence he had come and spread the news. And then a search party discovered the tragedy that had been enacted. The men of Wadiri had put the old men, and the old women, and the little children to the knife, and had ridden off with every virgin they could lay their hands upon. They had been taken as

concubines, these poor young girls, a thing to them far worse than the death that those they loved had encountered."

"I have heard much the same as this, Hindoo. There were a few that escaped to tell the tale?"

"Yes, a few of the young men, who had not the courage to fight for those they loved."

"And no reprisals were taken?"

"None. These men of Wadiri were strong fighters, and their stronghold was in the mountains. Nana Dun was not a lover of fighting in those days. There was talk of revenge. There were preparations. But it ended in nothing done. The people complained. But what can a people do when those that rule them are inactive?"

"And this terrible deed—it is still remembered, Hindoo?"

"It is still remembered, my son."

"I am glad of that, Hindoo."

"Glad?"

"Yes, for on this story are all my hopes founded. It was the remembrance of this story that suggested this plan of mine to me in the council. Without it I should not have dared to hope. Are you still in the dark, Hindoo?"

Michael lay back amongst the cushions of the divan with the look of one who has asked a riddle to which he expects no answer. Hindoo sat immovable in his chair, with his eyes fixed in vacancy. It seemed as though he had not heard the last words spoken. But presently he glanced up, and there was the look of understanding now in his eyes.

"It is a plan that calls for the working of a miracle," said he in a very low voice "But miracles

have been worked before. What is your wish, my son?"

"I want you to use this story, Hindoo. You are to do the propaganda work. I, with the help of my God, will do the rest."

"But if this thing fails—as fail it surely must?"

"Then we shall not be worse for our failure. If the British come to Umbarra it is the end for both of us, Hindoo."

"It will be even so. And if we succeed it will save my beloved country. My son, you have shown me the only way. My wisdom is but as a little child's when compared to yours. I saw nothing but darkness, and you have shown me a ray of light. I have done well to love thee as a son."

"Well, I can look to you," said Michael, rising and picking up his switch and pith topi. "Turn yourself into an optimist and work this propaganda dodge for all you're worth. I will try and work the rest. Good-bye. Don't expect to see me again. Let the others still think we are enemies. They must think that we have quarrelled irrevocably. Good-night. Allah bring luck to our venture."

And, so saying, he passed out through the windows into the moonlight beyond.

"There goes a brave man," said Hindoo, half aloud. "And a wise one. I wonder if he would have acted thus if he but knew the evil I have done him."

And, closing the shutters, he returned to the Koran that lay upon his table. But he no longer listened for the sound of a footstep in the compound outside. He whom he had expected had come and gone.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

DANGER THREATENS THEE, O MY BELOVED

MIAN GUL took the paper handed to him.

"I am to reconnoitre the route you have marked within, captain sahib," said he, "and I am to make my report. Good; it shall be done to-morrow at the rising of the sun."

Michael looked up from the large map from which he had taken distances.

"Yes, Mian," said he. "I have marked the stages and the compass bearings. They are written down upon the paper you carry. Remember, it is for cavalry rather than infantry that I want a suitable passage. Your report will decide if I have chosen right. If I am wrong you must put me right. It is understood?"

"It is understood, captain sahib."

He walked to the open windows and looked back.

"I think we can rely upon the White Horse," said he. "I have talked to them as you desired."

"It is well," said Michael, still measuring distances upon the large map with a pair of compasses. But he did not look up.

Mian Gul still stood in the moonlight by the open windows. It seemed as though something weighed upon his mind, and he could not find words to express it.

"I am risking much," he said presently. "I have not the wisdom to see if the thing we do is right."

Michael Hepburn looked up from the map.

"Ah, you have regrets, Mian? It is not too late to withdraw."

"Allah forbid! You are my brother, and I love thee as a brother. This thing I do shall be a proof of the great love I bear thee."

And, so saying, he turned, and went out through the windows. Michael sat for some time inactive at the table, and then, throwing the pair of compasses from him, rose to his feet.

"'If you can make a heap of all your gains, and risk it on one throw of pitch and toss,'" he quoted. "Mian has done that and he is indeed a man."

He switched off the electric lamp standing upon his table. Then he walked across to the piano in a nook by the window and began to strum. He felt restless; suspense was beginning to tell. Unconsciously he played an old Hindoo song that Jehan had often played to him. He played from ear very badly, but it helped him to pacify his nerves. Suddenly the moonlight was turned to darkness. He felt soft fingers pressed against his eyes, and smelt the faint aroma of henna. He took them gently in his own, and, rising, removed them as gently.

"This is very wicked of you, Jehan," said he, looking down into the pretty dark face smiling up at him. "You have risked much by this visit. Why have you come?"

She kept her arms about his neck, and clung tightly, as though she feared to let him go.

"Danger threatens thee, O my beloved," said she, with fear in her voice. "I came to bid thee fly from Umbarra."

"Tush, little Jehan," said he. "I have faced

danger before. There is little to fear on my account."

He led her to a divan and propped her comfortably amongst the cushions.

"Now tell me what makes you fear for me."

"It was Ramda, my cousin," said Jahannarra in excited tones. "She came to me from the palace. She has heard the Subahdar Pandy urging His Highness to throw you into prison. The subahdar does not trust you."

Michael smiled to himself. The subahdar had good grounds for his mistrust, he thought. But the smile disappeared almost as suddenly as it had come. What if the subahdar gained his way? It would be the end of all his scheming. He was trusted, he knew, by Nana Dun, but he knew the susceptibility of the man. Yes, he was in danger, but he hid his fears from the girl by his side.

"The subahdar will gain little from his pleading, Jehan," said he reassuringly. "Nana Dun trusts me implicitly, and all the talking in the world won't change his good opinion of me. Cheer up, little lady."

He took one of the tiny fair hands in his. The temptation to take her in his arms was strong upon him, but something that he could not define withheld him.

"Ah, you do not know His Highness," said Jehan. "He changes his mind as many times as the moon its spheres."

"Like a woman," said Michael sadly, a picture of happy days among the purlieus of an English home, and of a girl who had clung to him as this one had done, coming back to him.

"That is unkind, Michael beloved." Two little hands were laid upon his shoulder again, and a pretty face was placed temptingly close to his. "Some women are like that. But there are others who would lay down their life for those they love."

A heavy footstep in the passage caused Jehan to spring quickly from the divan, and shrink into the shadows of the room. There was a jingling of beads, and Harry Hawkins peered in through an opening in the curtains.

"I 'ope I don't intrude, sir," said he apologetically.

"What is it, Harry?" asked Michael, and to Jehan, "It's all right, little lady, it's only my imbecile of a batman."

"If you please, sir, I came on account of the lady's old woman," said Harry. "She's getting a bit nervy, sir."

He opened the curtains and came into the room. An old woman with deep lines upon her dark face, and dressed in gaudy silks of many colours, followed him. She held out her bony arms towards Jehan, and there fell the clinking of her heavy metal bangles ringing one against the other.

"What is it, Shana?" said Jehan anxiously, coming out of the shadows.

"They have followed us," cried the old woman. "Let us go back at once. Oh, it was folly to come. Why would you not listen to the words of an old woman?"

"How do you know that we are followed, Shana?" asked Jehan, and there was fear in her voice.

"I waited out in the compound to watch," said

the old ayah. "And presently I saw a shadow in the moonlight. I watched and waited, and I saw a man look out from the blackness beneath a banyan tree. It was Ezra Singh."

"The subahdar's secretary," said Michael. "He must not find you here, Jehan. But what is to be done? You cannot leave this place without being seen."

"Yes, Michael sahib, I came here unperceived and I shall return unperceived. Shana brought me by a path that lay in the darkness of the trees. It is you they are watching, I am sure of it. But I will go; it is safer. Shana, get my cloak."

And when the ayah left to do her bidding, and Harry was making a pretence of arranging books upon a table with his back turned, she whispered:

"Take care, O my beloved, you are in danger," and, drawing Michael's face to hers, she kissed him passionately. Then, turning, she fled from the room. Michael followed her out into the passage. As he passed through the curtains he saw two figures disappear through an open doorway into the compound, but when he came out into the darkness of the night they had disappeared. He returned, shut the door, and went back into his study. The curtains had been drawn and the electric light switched on.

"Thought I'd make you cosy, sir," said Harry, bustling here and there. "Too much dark ain't good for the eyesight."

"When you have finished you can leave me, Harry."

"Very good, sir."

Michael sat himself down at the table again and abstractedly took up a pair of compasses. But he did not see them, nor the map that lay in front of him. His thoughts were with Jehan. That she loved him he had no doubt. She had risked much to come and warn him. Her passionate kiss still burnt upon his lips. But what were his feelings for her? He tried to analyse them. He was very fond of Jehan, he told himself, but as yet he could not imagine her as his wife.

A loud clatter from the piano broke into his thoughts.

"What in heaven's name are you doing now, Harry?" he asked impatiently.

"I've just been polishing a bit of the silver, sir."

"Well, I wish you'd finish and get out."

"Couldn't let it get tarnished, sir, seeing as 'ow it's a sort of favourite of yours."

Michael glanced inquiringly towards the piano, and he saw that Harry had set up the photo of Dorothy so that the light fell full upon her pretty features.

"I thought I told you to put that away, Harry," said he.

A look of disappointment came into the batman's face.

"You used to like it once, sir," said he a little sadly.

"That is a thing of the past, Harry," said Michael. "It brings back unpleasant memories."

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I will put it away. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night, Harry."

For a long time after Harry had gone Michael sat

very still. Then suddenly, taking a pair of compasses, he fell to work upon the map.

"Yes," he muttered, as he worked the arms of the compasses from point to point, "it brings back memories that are unpleasant. It suggests the happiness that might have been. But it is all over. One of those affairs that come into a man's life and are after a time forgotten—I wonder?"

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

A NATIVE PLAYING UPON A TIN WHISTLE

THE sounds of a tin whistle played execrably floated up from the compound. Michael glanced up from the notes he was writing in the cool of the verandah. He saw a native sitting not twenty paces away, cross-legged beneath the shade of a palm, the instrument of torture stuck between his lips. A fakir—his ragged clothes of dirty yellow suggested it. A mendicant giving forth horrible discord as a penitential offering to his deity. But he must be a mad fakir this. Who had ever heard of a fakir aspiring to Orphean spheres with an instrument so modern as his stepping-stone? Confound the fellow, and his cheek! But the servants would be there presently to drive him away.

Michael turned to his notes again, and continued with his writing, but the discords from the compound broke into his thoughts. It was impossible to work with that din going on. He threw down his pen at last and looked again towards the offending musician. Dark figures were approaching the palm from the servants' quarters. In another moment the man would be flying, with cracking whips at his heels. He lay back to watch the scene.

The fakir beneath the tree saw his danger, but he did not move. Instead he blew the harder upon the whistle—a different tune now. Somehow it seemed familiar. Michael wondered where he had heard it before. And then suddenly came understanding. It was the Eton boating-song, but played so badly

as almost to be unrecognisable. His old song—and whistled by a fakir. He rose to his feet, and walked to the verandah rails. He looked again at the man beneath the palm. Then suddenly he called to the leading figure who approached the musician, whip in hand.

"Hi! Mukkan, Mukkan." And, when his major-domo stopped, "Send the fakir up here. I will deal with him."

A few peremptory orders from Mukkan brought the whistler to his feet, and he came nimbly across the compound and mounted to Michael's side. Then he squatted cross-legged down upon the floor, and began to play his terrible discords.

"Stop that damn row and tell me who you are," said Michael, looking closely at the seated figure.

"A good disguise, eh?" said the fakir in excellent English.

"Who are you?" again from Michael.

"The hon. Bertie Charters, at your service."

"Charters? Miracle of miracles," cried Michael in a voice filled with wonder. "You are the last man in the world I expected to see. I guessed that you were no begging fakir, but I never expected to see you. Get up and take a comfortable seat, man."

"I must play the fakir while I remain in the open, Michael," said the hon. Bertie. "I am being watched."

"Go into my study. We shall be safe from prying eyes there," said Michael, pointing the way.

And when the hon. Bertie, seated in a comfortable chair with a large glass of whisky in his hand, was rolling out raptures on meeting comforts again which had been denied him so long, Michael asked:

"What in heaven's name brings you to Umbarra?"

"A little secret service work for the Government, and incidentally to befriend you."

"To befriend me?"

"Yes, my friend Michael. You are playing a dangerous game. There's a large force being sent against you—the largest force ever sent on a punitive expedition."

"Thank you, Bertie," said Michael. "But I can take care of myself. Do you know your position isn't exactly rosy. If they discover you here there will be another vacancy in the Indian Secret Service."

"I know that. And I was never so much indebted to you as when you called off those servants of yours. I was giving up hope. This is the third bungalow I've serenaded. From the other two I fled with a murderous black crowd barking at my heels. If I had understood their lingo, I might have asked questions and saved myself this necessary sprinting. You see I was forced into this mad-brained serenading work to find out where you digged. Thank God you recognised the good old school song. It was a happy thought of mine, though I did think you'd recognise 'Annie Laurie.'"

"Good God!" cried Michael. "Was that awful din you made meant for 'Annie Laurie'? It was enough to make the shades of the composer rise and smite you. Anyway you're a very plucky fellow, Bertie. And you do not know one word of Hindustani? The marvel is how you have come so far in safety. Who informed you that I was in Umbarra?"

"That, Michael, is a question that I cannot

answer," said the hon. Bertie. "It might compromise a very pretty lady."

"Well, I shall not ask again," said Michael with a laugh. "And so you are sent by the Government?"

"Yes. They suspect someone is running the show here, and they wish to find out. Of course I shall know nothing when I get back. But there are others on the job, and they're bound to find out eventually. Then there will be the devil to pay. I warn you again, get out. Get out while there is yet time."

"There is no getting out. My hands are tied."

"Well, I can't understand you, Michael. You are treading in paths that will lead you to perdition. I suppose you've got good reasons for your actions, and I shall not be so impertinent as to ask for them. What I really want most anxiously to know is why you came to Umbarra. I am going to put a question the answer to which will ease my conscience. Was it because of what I told you that day we drove down Piccadilly together?"

Michael's face hardened at the mention of the episode. It broached a subject he was averse to talk upon. He was on the point of giving the real reason for his flight, but he recollected that it was Dorothy's place to tell the man she was going to marry. It seemed strange that she had not already told the hon. Bertie, but it was no business of his. If she did not mean to enlighten him, he certainly would not betray her.

"No, it was not that," he said.

A sigh of relief from the hon. Bertie.

"I'm deuced glad to hear that," said he. "I've

had an uneasy conscience for a long time. I'm afraid I spoke rather prematurely on that occasion. Yes, I'm relieved beyond measure to hear it was not that."

He would have liked to ask the real reason for Michael's flight. He suspected that there was a woman in the case. If only he could go back to Dorothy and say: "I'm afraid there is another lady," the way would be clear for him. But he could not broach the subject; it would be impertinence.

He rose to his feet.

"And now, Michael," said he, "If you can offer me a wash and a feed I shall be truly grateful."

Michael's call brought Harry from his quarters, and at sight of the visitor he broke out into his usual rhetoric.

"Good Lor'," he cried, "wherever did this scarecrow spring from?"

"This scarecrow flew in through the window, friend Harry," said the hon. Bertie with a laugh, "and at this present moment is in dire need of some of the comforts of life. I place myself in your hands, my friend."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Charters," said Harry apologetically. "I didn't recognize you in your rig-out. It's a corker. Thought you were a blooming fakir, a class I ain't on friendly terms with. But, seeing as 'ow it's you, I'll fix you up in no time."

"And mind you keep the other servants out of the way," said Michael. "Mr. Charters is not to be seen. You understand?"

"I understand, sir."

A few minutes later the hon. Bertie was splashing luxuriously in a canvas bath with the batman in servile attendance.

"And how do you like your present life?" asked the hon. Bertie, gasping after an immersion in the refreshing tub. "Better than London, eh?"

"Lor', yes," said Harry. "It's a little paradise after that. I know when I'm well off, and I wouldn't change for anyfink."

"And your master seems happy too, Harry. But isn't it a bit dull for him? No friends—at least no real friends to cheer him up."

"Oh, 'e ain't exactly lonely in that way," said Harry. "You see, there's a lady, sir."

"A lady?" said the hon. Bertie, splashing unconcernedly to hide the effect of this information. "A lady? You don't say so, Harry."

He had heard what he had come to find. So that was it! There was a woman in the case, as he had suspected. A great joy came into his heart. Dorothy was his now for the asking.

"Yes," said Harry mournfully. "I'm sorry to say it, but there is a lady. And I 'ope you'll treat what I tell you in confidence. I don't like it, sir. 'E used to be pally with a certain dear little lady in England. You know whom I mean, sir. She was always good to me, and I sort of took to her like. I 'ad 'opes that she and the captain would fix it up. Then along came this other black 'ussy and spoilt things. Now, sir, you are a friend, and 'e will listen to you. Tell 'im 'is conduct is rank treachery, and make 'im chuck this new walking-out partner. It's not playing fair, and I can't understand the captain. It's the first time

since I've known him that 'e ain't played straight."

"I'm afraid I haven't much influence with the captain, Harry," said the hon. Bertie. "Anyway, it's dangerous to interfere in these affairs. They are best left alone. If your master has really fallen in love with this black 'ussy, as you call her, nothing will shake him. It is best to leave things alone, Harry, and trust to providence. Perhaps he will get tired of her."

"I hope so sincerely, sir," said Harry. "I don't like this business. No good will come of it."

. . . . . .

While the hon. Bertie refreshed his tired limbs in *aqua pura* Michael sat at his desk upon the verandah. But he did not continue his work; his mind was too preoccupied for that. The coming of his friend had unsettled him. It brought back memories of Dorothy, and the glorious might-have-been. He had been learning to forget, and now the whole past lay emblazoned on his memory with every detail painfully distinct. And the man who had ruined his life was in the next room, under his roof. Why had he come? It would have been kinder to stay away.

The noise of marching men fell upon his ear. He glanced out into the compound. A squad of men were marching down the road, a tall figure at their head. He recognised the leader. It was Ezra Singh, the subahdar's secretary. What did it mean? He rose to his feet and walked to the verandah steps. At the gate the men were halted, and Ezra Singh, opening the gate, walked down the pathway towards the bungalow.

"What is the reason of this, Ezra?" asked Michael when the secretary stood at the foot of the steps. "What can I do for you?"

"A thousand apologies, captain sahib," said Ezra Singh. "This is indeed an intrusion. But I am under orders from my lord and master. I have the very unpleasant duty to perform of searching the captain sahib's quarters."

"Searching my quarters, my good Ezra? What do you mean?"

"I have orders from His Highness to search for the fakir who is no fakir, the musician who was seen playing but a little while ago in the captain sahib's compound."

So that was it? The hon. Bertie had been seen. Michael had but to tell Ezra Singh to go ahead and search, and the man who had ruined his life would be caught like a rat in a trap. It would be an easy way of getting rid of the man who stood in his way. For a moment Michael stood looking down upon the man who held the warrant of search. Then he raised his voice with a purpose.

"But, I tell you, Ezra," said he, "there is no fakir here. Surely you can trust my word."

The hon. Bertie would hear him. If only he could get away before a search was made! He glanced to the men who had been halted by the gateway, and to his dismay he saw that they had scattered. They were evidently obeying orders and spreading in a cordon round the bungalow. The hon. Bertie Charters was in a dangerous situation. He, Michael, must try and find a way of escape for him.

"Come in, Ezra," said he, "and let us talk about this affair."

And, when they were seated upon the verandah :

" Now, Ezra, who is this fakir you have been sent to find ? "

" That we do not know, captain sahib," said the secretary. " But he was seen, and it is suspected that he is an impostor. If you will have the goodness to forgive me I will make my search. This is a hateful thing that I have to do, but the captain sahib will understand, I am under orders."

" Of course, Ezra, I understand," said Michael. " I bear you no ill-will. But I feel a little hurt that you will not take my word for it."

If only he could persuade this man to trust him ! It seemed to him that unless he could the hon. Bertie was lost indeed.

" Again I offer my humble apologies, captain sahib. This affair is very painful for me, but I cannot disobey His Highness's instructions. I am afraid that I must make my search."

He looked towards the door that lay in front of him.

" Will the captain sahib do me the honour of showing me the way," suggested the secretary. " Or perhaps he would prefer I did my work alone ? "

" Very well, Ezra," said Michael reluctantly. " If you insist I will myself show you round my quarters."

He moved towards the doorway, but stopped short. The shrill discords of a whistle fell upon his ear, and they were approaching them. Was the hon. Bertie mad, then, to give himself up in this way ? The secretary moved quickly towards the door.

" Ah," said he. " The fakir was here, then, after all."

The next moment a figure dressed in gaudy rags stepped out upon the verandah, and the air was filled with ear-piercing blasts.

"That is my man," said Ezra Singh, stepping forward. "I have orders to arrest him."

Michael looked inquiringly at the man standing in the doorway. The hon. Bertie was mad indeed. Then, suddenly, he noticed something odd about the whistler. He looked closer, and as understanding came to him he felt greatly relieved. He watched Ezra Singh amusedly as he laid a hand upon the whistler's shoulder. And then the storm broke. The would-be fakir turned upon the unfortunate secretary.

"Who the 'ell are you a-shoving of?" cried he, and pushed him roughly away.

"What's the meaning of this tomfoolery?" said Michael, giving vent to his relief by laughing. The face of the secretary was good to look upon.

"Sorry, sir," said the faithful Harry, removing his turban and displaying the characteristic mop of unruly red hair. "A little joke with the servants. Took them all in properly, sir. A good make-up, eh? I didn't play in Christmas theatricals for nothink, you bet."

Michael turned to Ezra Singh.

"I'm sorry, Ezra," said he. "I must apologise for my servant's silly escapade. I hope you will also carry my apologies to His Highness. Tell him that he will be severely punished."

Ezra Singh looked blankly from Michael to the red-headed Harry.

"So your servant had been masquerading?" said he in Hindustani.

"It was stupid, very stupid. I am afraid I shall have to convey this intelligence to His Highness."

But he did not move, and Michael began to fear that the bluff had not worked after all. Would the secretary still demand to search the bungalow? He watched him anxiously, but was careful not to show his anxiety. Suddenly Ezra Singh drew himself up as one who has made up his mind.

"I will go and make my report," said he, and, saluting, turned and walked down the verandah steps.

Michael watched him go, saw him collect his men and march them off down the road. Then he sank into a chair.

"Thank God!" said he. "Harry, my boy, the hon. Bertie Charters owes you his life."

. . . . . .

That evening a solitary figure crept out into the darkness of the trees surrounding Michael's bungalow. He was dressed in gaudy rags, and he clutched a tin whistle in one of his hands.

"My journey was worth while," said he. "I have been repaid a hundredfold for all my hardships."

And he walked as one treading on air.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

MARCHING ORDERS

"THROUGH the mouths of the holy men this man has been proclaimed our saviour," said His Highness Nana Dun, sliding home the bolt of a new Lee Metford rifle that lay upon his knees. "And he and no other shall lead my armies against the *feringhis*. This has happened before, I am told. It will not be the first time in the history of our country that a *feringhi* has fought on our side. And on one occasion I am told he fought with success."

"Very well," said Subahdar Pandy, leaning back in his chair as one who has resigned himself to the inevitable. "But I hope your Highness will take the suggestion that I offered. I know the man well. It will bring him back to Umbarra if things should fail, and it will prevent treachery."

"Treachery? You are talking nonsense, subahdar."

"It is best to be prepared for all eventualities. It can do no harm anyway."

"It would give offence."

"What does that matter? There is too much at stake to consider trivialities."

"But the holy men have spoken."

"And the holy men have been known to make mistakes."

"Very well, then," said His Highness peevishly. "I will do as you suggest."

He rose to his feet, and, walking to one of the

latticed windows, looked down into the courtyard that seethed with moving soldiery.

"If he had hurried he should be here now?" he asked anxiously, looking back into the room.

"He should be here, Highness."

"Then why does he not come? Send another orderly."

The subahdar rose to his feet, and moved across the council chamber to the door. But half way he stopped, for the heavy tramp of feet was heard on the marble pavement of the courtyard outside. The next moment Michael entered the chamber and came stiffly to the salute.

"You sent for me, your Highness?"

"I sent for you, captain sahib. Your plans are made?"

"My plans are made."

"And you are prepared to march at once?"

"Everything is ready, your Highness."

"Good. You will lead my armies against the *feringhis* as soon as possible. I trust you. That is why I have conferred this command on you. There is but one reservation."

"A reservation?" Michael had felt elation at the news. Things were going well with him so far. But what was this reservation that the *peshwa* suggested? Would it spoil his plan. He waited anxiously for the disclosure, but he was careful to hide his anxiety.

"I am ready to do your bidding," he said.

"It is the subahdar's idea," said His Highness. "I have been told that a certain intimacy has sprung up between you and our friend's pretty niece."

"We are good friends certainly," said Michael

wondering what in heaven's name Jehan could have to do with the reservation.

"Jahannarra shall be a hostage for your good faith."

Michael felt a coming catastrophe. A dim perception of what was meant came to him.

"A hostage, your Highness?" said he, but there was firmness in his tone. He did not give his feelings away.

"Yes. If things should fail Jahannarra will be thrown into prison. Your return will gain her release. Do you understand?"

"I understand."

"Good. Then go in peace. And may Allah lead you to victory."

Michael walked back, through the ranks of soldiers, drawn up to attention in the courtyard, as one dazed. Jehan a hostage, and a prisoner! The thought was too cruel to be thought upon. It was the act of wild men. These men of Umbarra were little else. But Jehan should suffer no harm at his hands, that he was fully determined on. Yes, he would ride back to Umbarra although it meant death to do so. He had had other arrangements, but everything was altered now. Jehan should not remain in prison many days—a thing of light and joy pining in the darkness. His path was clear; he must take the one that led him to his doom, but released a pretty child from the horrors of a prison-house.

He mounted his horse and rode back, slowly and thoughtfully, along the road that led to his bungalow.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

CAPTAIN BOBBIE HILL

Captain Bobbie Hill, as his friends called him, stood looking over the wall of sandbags at the scene before him. A blazing sun scorched the hand that gripped for support, and a hot blast of air was wafted faintly against his cheek. It was the hour for siesta, but when danger threatens siesta becomes but a luxury to be enjoyed when the danger is past. Before him lay a large square marked out by a line of heaped sand. It was the parapet of his entrenchments—entrenchments that had been made hurriedly two weeks ago, when he and his small force of two companies of the line had been surprised by a large force of the Wadiris. Now he lay surrounded and many of his boys were missing from the ranks. They had fallen to the bullets of those who waited for their surrender. Help had been promised, but would it come in time? Provisions were running short. Ammunition was scarce, and water that was brought in at night by brave British gentlemen, who risked their lives that their comrades might drink, was becoming more difficult to obtain as the Wadiris discovered the various sources of supply. All day long his signallers were helioing without an answer. Things were getting desperate. A shot now and again cracked out sharply upon the air, and the ping of a bullet sounded in his ear as it flew across the trenches. He glanced across the brown line of parapet to where, some hundred yards away, a few low hummocks of sand formed a protection

from rifle fire. The Wadiris were hidden there, and showing their spite by keeping up a constant fire. Beyond the hummock line he saw low blue hills covered with banyan, and again beyond that a field of whiteness glittering like silver in the rays of the sun. It was the distant Himalayas—the land of perpetual snow. Bobbie Hill had been on these border expeditions before, and had come through safely. Danger to him was as the breath of life—he was a born soldier—a tight corner a delightful experience to be enjoyed. But this time it was different. Before it had been man to man, but now there were the women to be thought of—the two hospital nurses that had been in attendance when he was surprised. Yes, he worried; if only he could have got them away in time. A rifle cracked again from the direction of the hummocks, and a bullet pinged by uncomfortably close to his ear. He shook his fist defiantly at the heaps of sand. "Curse you!" he muttered. "You shall pay for this," and he jumped down behind the protecting wall of sandbags. Then he ran quickly across a piece of unprotected ground and came into a hollow safe from rifle fire. Here was a low wooden shanty with a sentry posted outside. The man saluted as he approached.

He returned the salute, and passed in. An orderly came stiffly to attention.

"Corporal Adams has returned, sir," said he.

"Good. I will see him at once."

Bobbie Hill walked into an inner room, and sat down at a table littered with papers and maps. A sheet of paper with neatly written matter lay on the blotting pad. He picked it up. It was a list

of stores that his quartermaster-sergeant had prepared for his inspection. He glanced at the items, and threw it aside. Then he sat lost in thought with knitted brows. "A week's supply," he said half-aloud presently. "A week's supply on half rations. It is time the relief took to forced marches."

He glanced up to see a khaki figure standing stiffly at attention, a young man with a dust-smeared face and a torn and dirty uniform.

"Thank God you have come back, corporal," said Bobbie Hill with animation. "I was getting worried. Draw up that chair and take a drink at this. You look as though you needed it."

He held forth a flask, and the corporal drank eagerly and handed it back.

"Now, Adams, I won't keep you long. You must turn in and sleep the clock round. What luck?"

"I'm afraid I bring bad news, sir," said the corporal. "I made my way to Umbarra."

"Good God!" cried Bobbie Hill. "You went far afield, corporal. I did not mean you to go all that way."

"I did not wish to come back without information, sir. I went to Umbarra, and there by hanging about, I got my chance. I managed to creep up to a picket at night without being seen, and I heard what I desired to know."

"Well done, corporal. I shall send in your name for this. Well, let's have your bad news. They are marching against us?"

"They are marching against us, sir. I was unable to hear details. But I should think there

are a large body by the hundreds of squads I saw drilling from my hiding-place in the jungle."

"Well, we shall have to double our vigilance, and hold 'em off till the relief comes, that's all, corporal. You've done good work, and you shall not be forgotten. Now get along and have a good feed and rest."

The corporal rose to his feet.

"There's one other thing, sir."

"Well, what's that, corporal?" said Bobbie Hill, looking up inquiringly.

"I heard a name mentioned, sir. There's an Englishman there apparently, and there was talk of him leading the attack."

"And the name you heard?" asked Bobbie Hill.

"Hepburn—Captain Hepburn, sir. I once served under a Captain Michael Hepburn in the 123rd, and I am wondering——"

"You are wondering if it is the same man?" said Bobbie Hill. "The thing's impossible. Captain Hepburn was a great friend of mine. I can answer for him. This man is probably some rotter who was kicked out of the ranks, and has taken Captain Hepburn's name."

"Well, I'm mighty glad to hear that, sir," said the corporal as one greatly relieved. "Captain Hepburn was a gentleman, and not the sort to go over to the enemy. I'll be getting along now, sir."

He rose to his feet, and, saluting, left the orderly room. For a long time after he had gone Bobbie Hill sat lost in thought, then suddenly he lent forward and touched a bell lying upon the table. The orderly came in answer to the metallic ting-ting.

" Ask Nurse West to come to the orderly room. That is, if her duties will permit her."

" Very good, sir."

When the orderly had gone Bobbie Hill got up and paced restlessly up and down the room. The news that the corporal had brought him concerning the marching of the *peshwa's* troops was not the cause of his agitation. It was what he had expected. But that a white man should lead them, and that white man an old friend, was a cruel blow. That it was Michael he had little doubt. He knew his painful story. And his flight from England pointed to some such escapade. His old friend, then, had stepped upon the last rung of the ladder that led into the pit. It was distressing. He heard a light footstep in the room, and turning, found himself face to face with Dorothy West. She wore a pith topi helmet and the white clothes of a hospital nurse on service. Her pretty face was browned by the sun, but had not lost any of its prettiness.

" You sent for me, sir ? " said she, with a cheeky curtsey. " It's very, very important, I hope. My patients are calling out for me. I shall be dreadfully angry if you're wasting my time."

Bobbie Hill carried forward a camp stool, and set it out for her.

" You must be lenient if I've made a mistake," said he, " and put it down to the responsibilities of command."

He lit a cigarette to steady his nerves. It was a trait of Bobbie Hill's to be bashful in the presence of women.

" I've just had a piece of information brought

me. It's concerning a friend—an old friend. He's not playing—at least——"

And then he broke down absolutely.

"I should say yours is a case of sunstroke," said Dorothy, laughing in spite of herself. "What is all this about an old friend?"

Her laughter gave him courage.

"You remember the other day we were discussing a mutual friend—Captain Hepburn?"

The smile went from Dorothy's face.

"What have you heard concerning him?" she asked, and there was coldness in her voice.

"They say that he is leading the attack against us."

"Impossible! You have no right to believe such stories."

She rose to her feet.

"It came from a fairly reliable source," said Bobbie Hill desperately. He quailed under the burst of anger.

"I am hurt that you, one of his oldest friends, should give credence to such a yarn. You are all down on him because he had the misfortune to be dismissed from the Army. He is far too great a gentleman to be guilty of such treachery. You have indeed wasted my time. I will go back to my patients."

She turned her back on him, and walked out of the orderly room.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Bobbie Hill when the storm had gone. "I'm blessed if I haven't put my foot in it again. Trust me when there's a woman in the case to make a mess of it."

. . . . . .

Upon a bank of sand, under a piece of canvas that gave him protection from the scorching rays of the sun, sat Private MacIver, of No. 4 Platoon, A Company, The Delhi Fusiliers. To the casual observer he might be taking a siesta, but every now and then he would raise himself, and, looking over the parapet of the rough entrenchment, shake his fist at a line of sand dunes not a hundred paces away. Then the air was filled with language that was terrible to hear.

It was during one of these outbursts that another khaki figure slid down the parados, and bumping into the gesticulating private, sent him unceremoniously flying back into his seat.

"A waste of energy, Mac," said the newcomer. "They ain't worth it. Look at the honest sweat you expend on these attacks. Keep yer energies, man, till you get a chance of sticking a bayonet into their dirty 'ides. That's what I says."

Private MacIver wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Och aye, Jim," said he. "No doot yeer right. But I'm thinking that maybe we'll have to bide a teerible long time."

"No news yet, Mac," said the newcomer, scooping out a seat for himself in the sand. "I've just been relieved off my signalling stunt. Two hours I've been at it, and devil an answer."

"And ye'll no get one," said Private MacIver, spitting forcibly into the sand.

The signaller unhitched his water bottle, proffered it, and when it was refused held it to his lips. Then he corked it carefully, and strapped it back in place.

"It's always been my experience in the Army,"

said he thoughtfully, "that the moment you do something wrong is the moment for the General to appear."

"Och aye, Jim. I dinna doot the truth of that."

"Well, it's failed this time, Mac. I've just signalled 'The General can go to the devil,' and I have not got an answer."

"The General's canny, Jim. He's no fashing himself to hurry into this——"

He did not finish; the signaller had caught him suddenly by the arm.

"Hist, Mac!" he cried excitedly. "There's a fellow out there asking for it."

Private MacIver took his rifle lovingly in his hand and peered over the parapet. A black figure was crawling in the sand to the left of the sand dunes, about five hundred yards away. The Scotsman slid his rifle upon the parapet.

"What range do you ken it is?" he asked.

"Four hundred, Mac."

"Ah, weel, we'll mak it four-fifty."

Private MacIver slid up the sights to the requisite range. Then he took careful aim.

"He's a deilish plucky fellow, and it's a peety to shoot," said he. The next moment the crack of his rifle rang out upon the air. But the figure still crawled towards them in the sand.

"You were short, Mac," cried the signaller. "Up fifty."

Again the sights were adjusted. Another shot rang out, and a spit of sand flew up unpleasantly close to the crawling figure. For a moment it lay inanimate upon the sand, and then, kneeling up commenced to move its arms.

"Stay, Mac. The fellow's signalling in semaphore."

Private MacIver lay down his rifle and glanced across the scintillating plain of sand. Yes, there was no doubt the figure was sending a message. The signaller, note-book in hand, was eagerly transferring the message to the paper. Presently, when the pantomime was over, the signaller snapped his book to with a bang.

"He says he's an Englishman, and is coming in."

"The deil he is!"

"What's to be done, Mac?"

"Let him in, ye fule, and if he's no what he says he is there'll be a little bayonet work."

Ten minutes later a man, clad in dirty rags, tumbled into the trench. He was a small man, and his skin was ivory black, but one of his arms, from which the sleeve had been ripped, showed white above the elbow.

"You damned idiots!" he cried. "Couldn't you see I was a friend? I ask you, you two blithering sons of dolted fathers, would anyone, if he wasn't one of you, try to crawl in at this time of the day? Thank God you are a rotten shot, else I should have been left lying out there for carrion to pick. Now take me to Captain Hill at once."

"A rotten shot!" muttered Private MacIver, watching the signaller and the newcomer disappearing along the trench. "I've no been called that since I was a bonny recruit. What a peety I didna get him."

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THE ENEMY AT THE GATE

In a long, low-roofed building, which was constructed of sun-dried mud, sat Bobbie Hill and his staff. The building was the prehistoric remains of a fort, and now it had been turned into a mess. Dirty and dark, it was nevertheless a welcome protection from the sun, and it was voted a piece of luck to find such a haven in the small piece of ground that made up their defensive zone. At the tunnel-like entrance a private rocked a piece of canvas hung on poles, which sent a current of air circulating through the building.

Captain Bobbie Hill sat at the head of a long table made of rough trestles, and played with the small portion of bully that lay in front of him on a tin plate. One loses the fondness for bully after three weeks of no other fare. The doctor, a young man of twenty-three, who had but recently qualified and joined up, sat upon a pile of sandbags and smoked a large pipe with a worried look upon his face. And Lieutenant Watkins, who was the youngest of the three, ate his bully with avidity and talked of happy days in England.

"Well, you're a cheerful fellow, Watkins," said the doctor presently. "That description of yours makes one's mouth water. Give me the glorious feeds at the Troc, and the dances at the Savoy, and the spoony-oony flirtations, as you call 'em, and I'll swap them any day for the so-called romance of soldiering. Anything fresh to-day, Bobbie?"

"A bit of bad news, I'm afraid," said their commander, pushing away his bully uneaten. "Adams is back."

"Adams!" cried both his subordinates in one voice.

"Yes. Apparently Umbarra's marching against us."

They did not speak at once. The doctor lay back on his pile of sandbags, and mopped his brow with a silk handkerchief. Lieutenant Watkins lit a cigarette.

"I'm sorry to give you such dismal tidings," said Bobbie Hill presently, "but I thought you ought to know."

"Of course, Bobbie," said the doctor. "Good chap. It's best to hear the truth. And how long do you think it will be before we have this other hornets' nest round our ears?"

"Let's hope that it will be delayed for a few days," said Bobbie Hill fervently. "There's been no answer to the helio to-day. They should pick up our message at eighty miles' range. That's three days' forced march. If these fellows arrive on the scene before then it's all up with us."

"Our boys will hold 'em off, skipper, never fear," said Lieutenant Watkins with the optimism of youth. "I'll answer for my company, anyway."

"I don't like it," said the doctor. "They nearly got through last night. It was touch and go. Throw a few new troops among 'em—troops who haven't tasted our punishment—and they'll swamp us."

"There spoke the pessimist," said Lieutenant Watkins. Then he rose precipitately to his feet, followed by the others. Dorothy West, and a

companion nurse, had passed in through the tunnel-like entrance where the perspiring private worked the home-made punka.

Immediately there was a running competition to be first to find comfortable seating accommodation and food, and when the best had been done with the poor material available, the three resigned themselves and went back to their seats.

"Do you know, Nurse West, I've been kicking myself since that interview of ours," said Bobbie Hill. "I'm afraid I jumped to a foolish conclusion. I hope you will forgive me."

"I am glad you have come to reason, Captain Hill," said Dorothy with a smile. "You are forgiven."

"Good! And when we've whacked these Wadiri fellows, and get out of this place," said Bobbie Hill, "I'll treat you to the biggest feast—everybody here—that money can buy."

"Oh! for a good plate of oysters," cried Lieutenant Watkins.

"And a nice fat duck," said the doctor.

"And champagne," said Bobbie Hill, smacking his lips.

"And a good plate of turtle-soup, and asparagus, and succulent fish, and potatoes nicely fried, and a lovely bowl of iced fruit-salad," said the doctor.

"Yum-yum. It makes my mouth water," said Lieutenant Watkins.

Dorothy pushed away her plate.

"Thank you," said she. "You have put me off my bully. Oh, what greedy creatures are you men. Always thinking of your meals."

The three culprits sat with serious faces. When

beauty rails there is little use for speech. Dorothy turned to her companion.

"Get along back to the boys, Elsie," said she. "I will be there in a minute. I have something to say to Captain Hill."

And, when the other nurse had left them:

"I wish to ask a question," said she. "When Elsie and I are with you, you are the most cheerful fellows on earth. It is very sweet and kind of you, and I know it is done to cheer us up. But I have watched you when you did not know I was watching, and you all look worried. You are keeping something back. We would rather know the truth. How long can we hold out?"

"Until the relief comes, nurse," said Bobbie Hill with averted eyes. "We can hold them till then."

"Then why do you look so worried when Elsie and I are not present?" said Dorothy, looking hard at the embarrassed Bobbie Hill. "There is some news you are keeping from us. Please let us into the secret, Captain Hill."

"Really there is nothing to tell," said Bobbie Hill desperately. "All soldiers with a command and responsibilities must wear a worried look, I suppose, when they are in a tight corner. Isn't that so, Watty?"

"Yes, yes," said his subordinate, lighting another cigarette. "The responsibilities of the command of A Company will turn my beautiful auburn hair grey before many days have gone."

Dorothy stamped a little foot upon the hard mud floor.

"I do wish you would be serious. Please, please tell me the truth."

"I shall have much pleasure in giving you the information you require, Dorothy."

They all started, and turned at the sound of a strange voice. A man had entered unperceived, and stood in the dim light of the mud hovel.

"Who are you? And how the devil did you get in here?" cried Bobbie Hill, jumping to his feet.

The man standing in the shadows looked for all the world like one of the enemy who lay entrenched around them. His flowing rags and dark skin suggested it, but his good English accent gave him away.

"The hon. Bertie Charters, at your service," said the man, coming forward and flopping into the seat Bobbie had vacated. "And I'm famished."

"Charters!" cried Bobbie. "Well, this beats the record. The last time I had the pleasure of meeting you was at school, and here you are tumbled out of the clouds. This is the last place on God's earth I should have expected to meet you again. How did you get here?"

For a few minutes the hon. Bertie ate with avidity the bully that had been discarded by the others. Then he drained two of the flasks offered him. His wants for the time satisfied, he sat back in his chair.

"A little secret service work for the Government," said he. "I've been spying in Umbarra, and have brought back some useful information. I should have been back in Bombay by now, but I missed my way and stumbled blindly into your show. If one of your men hadn't been a poor shot I should have been lying out in the sand stiff and stark."

"It must have been one of the fellows of B Company," said Lieutenant Watkins.

"Then heaven bless B Company, and the man who missed," said the hon. Bertie. "And now for the news. It is better that Dorothy should know. I meant to keep this thing quiet. The fellow was a friend of mine, but such rank treachery as this breaks all bonds. The man who is marching against us is a once-time friend of all of us, Captain Michael Hepburn."

"Good God!" cried Bobbie Hill. "Then it was true after all!"

"It's a lie," cried Dorothy, jumping to her feet. "Michael could not, would not, be so base."

"It is the truth," said the hon. Bertie. "I have seen him and spoken with him."

"You have seen him?"

"Yes, in Umbarra. I only learnt afterwards that he was to lead their troops against us."

"Then there is nothing more to be said," said Dorothy, with a break in her voice. "I will go back to the hospital now. My boys will be wanting me."

She turned and went, thankful that the dim light of the place hid the tears that had come into her eyes. And back in the temporary mud hut, that formed the field hospital, the poor fellows lying upon their stretchers wondered why the usual laughing, jolly nurse walked among them with so sad a look upon her pretty face.

"She's overdoing it," said a sergeant with a shattered leg to a private lying close by. "If that pretty bit of goods breaks down there'll be some of us boys missing her pretty badly."

"Gawd bless her," said the private with difficulty, for a bullet had perforated his right lung.

Meanwhile, back in the mess Bobbie Hill was remonstrating with the hon. Bertie Charters.

"I think you might have spared the nurse," said he. "That information was rather painful, you know."

"My dear fellow," said the hon. Bertie, "it's about the best thing I could have done. The man's an out and out rotter, and it's only kind to her to let her know the truth."

"You're right," said the doctor. "It is best to let them know the truth. Many a good woman has thrown herself away upon a worthless fellow because the truth was withheld from her."

"And now," asked the hon. Bertie, "have you heard any news of the relief?"

"They are not within three days' march," said Bobbie Hill.

"That's black. I didn't tell Nurse West. It's best to keep these things from the women. But five hundred cavalry have bivouacked not half a mile from here. They rode in two hours ago with this fellow Hepburn at their head. I saw them, and then crawled in."

"Five hundred cavalry!" said Bobbie Hill in a low voice. "They will attack to-morrow. I'm afraid this spells the end."

"God help us all," said the doctor.

"Amen to that," said Lieutenant Watkins.

And they sat silently smoking, while from outside there came to them the scrunch, scrunch of the sentry's feet as he moved about his post, and the occasional crack of a rifle.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

FIVE HUNDRED STRONG

A BLUE crow sat upon one of the balustrades of the old bridge, and blinked lazily at the sun. All was peace in his world. Below, the river ran slowly by, and was deserted save for a sleepy crocodile basking in the mud. And the only sound breaking in upon the silence around him was the glug, glug of the current as it eddied round the piles in the water below. So he composed himself for siesta. But not for long. Some sound suspicious to his keen jungle ear came to him. He sat up with bristling feathers, all his wits on the alert. Then suddenly he flapped his wings, and flew lazily away. A man had walked out on to the bridge. His hand ran along a wire as he walked, and he followed it till it came to an end half way across the bridge. Here he halted, and, springing on to the balustrade, let himself down on the other side. For a few moments he remained below, then, swinging himself up again, he walked slowly back whence he had come, feeling the wire all the time. When he arrived at the end of the bridge he sat down on a tree-frond, and, taking out a cigarette, lit it. Then he glanced along the white ribbon of road that crossed the bridge and zigzagged up the face of the hill on the other side. He kept his eyes fixedly in this direction, and sat silently waiting. Cigarette after cigarette was taken out and smoked. Minutes grew into hours, but still the man sat with his eyes fixed upon the white ribbon of road. Once or twice he walked out on to the bridge, and felt the

line of wire. But he always returned to his old place to renew his watch. Many hours must have passed since his first appearance, when suddenly he rose to his feet, and stood listening. A sound had fallen on his ear—faint, like the roll of thunder in the distant hills. He listened intently for a few minutes, then throwing away a half-smoked cigarette he left the roadway, and plunged into the foliage of the jungle.

A black speck had appeared round the shoulder of the hill in the far distance—a black dot upon the white surface of the dusty road. Others followed, two by two, until a long line of black dots lay studded along the thin, white, distant track. They moved nearer, and soon the dots developed into horsemen riding at a canter. Nearer still, until the man lying hidden in the undergrowth could see the colours of the uniforms they wore—white tunics and breeches with scarlet turbans, the streamers flowing out behind them as they rode. A fine body of men, five hundred strong, each man carrying a long lance in his right hand, and a rifle resting in a holster upon his horse's flank. Five hundred men, each riding a white horse. They clattered down the road towards the bridge, thundered across, and rode up the face of the slope beyond. A trail of dust-cloud rose up behind them, and hid them from sight. The man hidden in the foliage came out when they had gone. He turned his eyes again to the shoulder of the hill whence they had first appeared. Other dots had appeared by now, smaller and moving slower. The man knelt down by the tree-frond and scraped for a few minutes amongst the dried ferns. His hand brought forth a small box-like arrangement, wires

tailing from the bottom. He examined it carefully. Then he glanced along the road again. The new dots could be distinguished now. Infantry this time—men marching in fours, but travelling at a snail's pace in comparison to the troopers who had just thundered by. The man watched them for a moment or two, then he set the box down upon the ground and moved a switch. There was the sound of metal clinking against metal, and the hum of clock-work machinery within the small box. The man rose to his feet, and, plunging once more into the jungle, ran as though for his life. A path strewn with ferns lay before him. He followed it blindly, tripping more than once, but he did not decrease his pace. Suddenly, as he ran, a thunderous report rang out upon the air, and the earth beneath his feet trembled violently. But he still ran on until he came out into a clearing, where the face of the hill was covered with bare brown rocks. A horse tethered to a tree whinnied affectionately as he burst through the undergrowth. He passed it by without a word, and, springing upon one of the rocks, looked back whence he had come. Below him across the tops of giant ferns he saw the broad surface of the sluggish river, in the centre a tangled mass of floating wreckage, and upon either bank a few piles sticking out of the water. The bridge had gone. The work assigned to him had been successfully done. A solitary horseman had ridden forward, and stood upon the opposite bank looking down upon the wreckage. The infantry had halted a good mile from the scene of destruction. The man upon the rock shook his fist at the solitary horseman.

"Your little game is cooked, my son," he called.

"You won't get across that 'ere river till our little show's over. Good-bye, Mr. Subahdar Pandy, and may I never see your blooming face again."

And, jumping down from the rock, he untethered the horse, and mounting, rode at a canter down the path.

. . . . . .

"I have inspected the vedettes, captain sahib. They are all placed."

Mian Gul threw himself down upon the soft bed of ferns by Michael's side, and stirred the fire that crackled brightly. Great shadows cast by the deodars under which they were encamped lay around them.

"There is no news of the captain sahib's havildar?" asked Mian Gul presently when Michael did not speak.

"No news, Mian. I expected him in by now. I hope he has not met with failure. If the infantry arrive on the scene we are undone."

"It would be indeed unfortunate," said Mian Gul again, stirring the fire.

Out of the darkness there floated up to them the laughter and chatter of the troopers who had ridden with them from Umbarra. They were bivouacked not twenty paces away.

Through an opening of the trees, shining like stars in the darkness, were tiny fires down in the valley. They marked the entrenchments of the Wadiris, and beyond them still tinier specks—the stronghold of the besieged Bobbie Hill and his two companies of the line.

For a long time Michael lay gazing down upon the

pin-pricks of light of the valley. Then suddenly he turned to the man by his side.

"Mian," said he. "I feel that I am asking too much of you. It is not too late to change your mind."

"And I tell you again, captain sahib, for me there is no going back."

"If the men are not with us we ride to our death to-morrow, Mian."

"If Allah has decreed it, so be it. I am not one to quarrel with the will of Allah."

"You're a good fellow, Mian. God bless you."

A hand was extended in the dim light from the fire, warmly clutched, and held for a time.

"I love you as my brother, captain sahib. May Allah give his help to-morrow."

Again silence fell between them. They lay for a long time without speech, staring down into the night. Suddenly a crackling of twigs and the fall of footsteps aroused them. They looked expectantly up, and a man staggered into the light of the fire.

"Well, Harry," cried Michael, sitting up. "Any luck?"

"The bridge has gone, sir."

"Good old Harry! I knew you would bring it off. That's one of our little worries gone."

"The havildar is a treasure of treasures," said Mian Gul.

A commotion from the troopers' quarters came to them.

"Hallo!" cried Michael, jumping to his feet. "What's the trouble now?"

He walked quickly, followed by Mian Gul, to

where fires burned amongst the trees. They came presently upon a crowd of little dark figures clustered in a circle.

"What's wrong?" asked Michael as the men made way for him.

He passed into the midst of the crowd, and saw a stretcher laid out upon the ground with a man lying upon it.

"They've killed Rangel Singh," said a man, stepping forward and saluting.

"The swine!" said Michael, kneeling down by the stretcher.

He laid his hand upon the trooper's pulse while the others watched him anxiously. Presently he looked up.

"He's dead," said Michael, rising to his feet. "These Wadiris are a treacherous lot, and not to be trusted. Let the vedettes know what's happened, sergeant. They will keep better watch."

A growl of anger rose from the crowd collected round them. The trooper who lay dead upon the stretcher was very popular.

"Good-night, men," said Michael, and he made his way back to his own fire beneath the trees.

"Mian," said he as they went, "the Wadiris have got my message. They will expect the attack at dawn to-morrow. Not many hours to wait, Mian."

"Not many hours? Thank Allah! This suspense is terrible."

They lay down by the crackling fire, and closed their eyes. Mian, tired by the day's ride and excitement, soon fell to sleep. But sleep would not come to Michael. His thoughts were with his comrades, who lay surrounded down in the valley,

and the scheme that he had to help them. Would it be successful? He doubted it, and his fears kept him from sleep. And so he lay watching for the dawn that would see the end of this foolish escapade.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

THE CHARGE OF THE WHITE HORSE

THE first break of dawn, a golden glow in the East, found Michael still sitting by the embers of the fire. He turned to the sleeping figure by his side, and touched him gently upon the shoulder.

"Mian," said he, "the time has come."

His companion sat up, and rubbed his eyes.

"What is it?" he asked, in a subconscious state.

"It is the dawn at last. Thank God! It is the dawn."

Michael rose to his feet.

"I have been envying you all night," said he. "You've slept as soundly as a babe. You're a lucky fellow, Mian."

Mian Gul rose to his feet and shook the dried leaves from his clothes.

"It is a good omen," said he with a laugh. "It shows I have faith in our adventure."

They walked together towards the troopers' quarters. Arrived there, they saw a long line of horsemen drawn up in column—an army of shadows in the dim light of the coming dawn. Two unmounted horses, attended by grooms on foot, stood a little apart.

Michael approached one of the horses and swung himself into the saddle. Then he rode along the line of troopers, followed by Mian Gul, inspecting the men as he rode. That done, he rode out in front of the column, and gave the command to stand easy.

"White Horse of Umbarra," said he, "I am

proud of you. No finer body of men could one wish to see. I come from the country that turns out the finest fighting men in the world. They, too, would be proud to have you as a unit. It is this nation that you have been sent out to wage a stupid war against. I say stupid although I have been sent as your commander. You do not know how great the power of the *feringhis* is. It is a thing to be afraid of, this power. They have ruled India by it for many years. The whole strength of your country has failed to break it. What, then, can a few tribes succeed where millions have failed? To-day a few men lay surrounded down in the valley. You can ride down and wipe them out. What happens? The *feringhis* will come in their thousands and lay waste your homes. I have heard that the General Sahib is on the march with the largest force ever sent into the hills. The day he comes will bring sorrow and suffering to the wives and children you have left behind. Would it not be better a thousand times that you should treat the British as your friends? I say it, and your commander Mian Gul says it too."

The troopers, who had been whispering one to another, some: "What madness is this?" others "Surely our good captain sahib has been touched by the sun," fell silent on this, and all eyes were fixed on Mian Gul.

"The captain sahib utters my thought," said he.

"You see," continued Michael, "I am not alone in my ideas. And now I am going to ask you to remember the kind of people you have been sent to help. These Wadiris are treacherous people. They are not to be trusted. Have any of you forgotten

the affair of Settra? Yesterday you rode through a village, or, rather, the charred remains of a village. You remember the story of that pitiful affair, some of you."

Angry cries came out of the shadows: "Yes, we remember, captain sahib," and one cried above the rest, "I lost a sweetheart and it was never avenged."

"That village was burnt by whom?" continued Michael when the hubbub died down. "By the very people you have sided with—the Wadiris. They came down by night from their hills and murdered man, woman, and child. They were never punished for it. Shame to the people of Umbarra say I. What is to prevent them acting thus again? Will you league yourselves with such vile men as these? I think I know you better than that. You desire to avenge Settra. Last night these Wadiris shot Rangel Singh. You desire to avenge his death also, for he was a brave man. I have given you your opportunity."

He pointed a finger through an opening in the trees. Down in the valley a line of men were advancing towards the ridge which they occupied—black dots in a sea of brown sand.

"They are coming to attack us," continued Michael. "Yesterday I sent word that we fought on the side of the *feringhis*, and would attack them at dawn. You can ride back whence you have come, and avoid this fight. No doubt explanations will bring peace with the Wadiris. Or you can ride down with your commander and me. I give no orders. You are free to act as you wish."

He drew his sword and waved it towards the black crowd swarming up the face of the slope.

"I ride to avenge Settra and Rangel Singh," cried Michael, and put spurs to his horse.

"And I," cried Mian Gul. "I, too, ride with the captain sahib."

"And I," said another voice, pushing his way from amongst the troopers. "I'm in this 'ere little show. And you, you bally cowards, can ride back to your mothers."

And, shaking his fists at the troopers sitting transfixed upon their horses, Harry Hawkins rode after the two horsemen disappearing amongst the trees.

"We ride alone, Mian," said Michael, as they broke out of the wood.

"We ride alone, captain sahib. But we ride to the glory of Allah."

A few shots greeted them from the valley below when they were seen, and ricochetted from the surface of the ground uncomfortably close.

"My heart is dead within me," cried Mian. "I put my trust in the White Horse. They have deserted us in our hour of need."

"Three against a multitude," cried Michael. "We must show them how brave men die."

"Not three, captain. Look behind," cried the voice of Harry at their heels.

Michael glanced back towards the wood. Two horsemen were galloping after them. Even as he looked others broke out of the wood and put spurs to their horses. More followed in quick procession, until the brown sand was thick with flying figures of white. The White Horse of Umbarra had answered to their leader's call. The thunder of their horses' hoofs was as sweet music in Michael's ears.

"Thank God!" he cried. "Mian, your men

could not see you ride to your death. Your trust in them was just."

"Allah be praised!" cried Mian, waving his sword above his head. "The White Horse will this day cover themselves with glory."

Down below them the small black figures were moving quickly into fighting positions. The cry of "Risalla, Risalla" floated up to them, and there was fear in the cry. Shots began to rain thick and fast. The ranks of the sweeping line of horsemen were being thinned as horse after horse, hit by the flying steel, tumbled crashing into the sand.

Michael gripped his sword, and prepared himself for the coming shock. Joy was in his heart. It looked as though success would come to his mad-brained scheme after all, and that the British garrison would be saved. But there was the fighting to be done, and he meant to sell his life dearly.

The White Horse were close on their heels now, each trooper going for all he was worth, yelling curses, yelling to Allah, low bent in the saddle so as almost to be lying on their horses' backs. The frenzy of war was on them, and it boded ill for those black figures in the valley.

Their cries came up louder and louder, till "Risalla" sounded like a roar of thunder. Bullets pinged by in rapid succession and the sand was scattered by the flying metal as though wafted by the winds of a hurricane. But still the line of horsemen swept on, the air filled with the flashings of their curved swords as they swung them aloft in anticipation. And then came the shock as the horsemen swept into the rabble that rose up to meet them with cries of fear.

Michael found himself swinging his sword at black faces that rose up around him like ugly faces in a dream. He was conscious of a wonderful calmness. He had felt fear as he rode down the hill, but now that he was face to face with his danger it did not trouble him. He swung his sword about him with a speed that he did not until then think himself capable of. Men went down like ninepins. But others rose to take their place, and swung at him with devilry writ upon their black faces. He hacked his way through untouched, rode out into a clearing, was about to turn back when another crowd appeared, apparently from nowhere, like phantasmagoria upon a screen. Before he quite realised his danger he was down, grovelling in the sand, with his horse kicking wildly in its death agonies beside him. He rose quickly to his feet, and prepared to meet the swarm that ran shrieking at him. He bowled down two, and felt a numbing sensation in his left arm. Then the crowd scattered, and Mian rode up, swinging as he rode at the flying figures. A few troopers followed him. One poor fellow was shot as he rode forward, and fell at Michael's feet, with a nasty stream of blood oozing from his forehead. He rolled over and showed that the back of his skull had been blown out.

Michael swung at the horse now riderless, seized its rein, and jumped into the saddle. Then he rode forward with the others, cutting his way as he went.

How long Michael fought he never knew. It seemed an eternity to him. Presently he rode out through the dense crowds. He was conscious that his arm was very painful, and that he felt very dizzy.

He halted his horse upon the summit of a small hill, and looked back.

The whole plain was covered with flying figures, the White Horsemen of Umbarra at their heels. The line was broken. The Wadiris were seeking cover in flight. Michael watched the scene with exultation. No quarter was given by the men of Umbarra. The air flashed with light as the sun caught the burnished surface of their swinging swords. Black figures went down at every stroke. He saw the pursued turn and fire point blank when overtaken, or slash with his long knife. What chance had they against a mounted man? The odds were against them, and the plain was lumbered thick with fallen Wadiris.

He sat for a long time watching the scene with a consciousness that he was very weak and tired. Gradually the fight drew away into the distance, but he could still see the flashing swords of the cavalry as they hunted on. Then suddenly he became conscious that someone was hailing him. He turned and saw a khaki figure walking out to meet him. He tried to articulate and call out, but he found speech would not come. Then he felt the sensation of falling, and all became darkness.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

A FRUITLESS MEETING

"No serious damage. Fainted from loss of blood. Throw down your flask, old son."

The doctor raised Michael's head, and, taking the flask Bobbie Hill proffered, poured some of the liquid between the clenched teeth.

"He'll live yet to wear that V.C. you're recommending," said the doctor as the colour began to come back into the livid white cheeks.

"Thank God for that," said Bobbie Hill. "No man deserved it more. Hallo, he's coming to."

Michael opened his eyes, and looked about him wonderingly. Then his glance fell on Bobbie Hill.

"Bobbie, by all that's wonderful!" he cried. "So it was you these brutes had cornered. But how's the fight?"

"Thank's to you, and your spring out of the blue, the fight's over. Your men have chased the Wadiris somewhere beyond the horizon line, and my boys are once more stretching their legs above ground. They're waiting back there to give you a little welcome."

He pointed to a line of entrenchments not a hundred yards away, where a small crowd of khaki figures stood gazing in their direction.

"They watched your ride," continued Bobbie Hill. "They'll shout like blazes when they know you're not seriously hit."

"Come," said the doctor. "We must get him in out of this sun."

Between them Michael managed to walk towards the entrenchments. He felt dizzy, but he had not lost the strength to walk.

A wonderful scene met him. Khaki figures leapt towards him, cheering only as British Tommies can cheer. Gently a sergeant and a private lifted him from his feet and carried him through a lane of cheering men, and the crowd, still shouting and hurrahing, followed him down to the temporary field hospital.

Here the sergeant and private laid him down upon a stretcher soft with a pile of army blankets.

"The damned pluckiest ride I've ever seen in my life," said the sergeant.

"Christ!" said the private. "I shan't never forgit the way you cut them devils down."

And with his "Thank you, boys, for carrying me down," they turned and left.

Michael looked around him. He was in a mud hut, and in semi-darkness. A few yards away lay men in stretchers, looking towards his corner in quiringly—wounded men, no doubt wondering at the strangeness of his white costume and scarlet turban. Then he saw a figure in white glide into the light by the tunnel-like entrance—a dainty figure with a large red cross emblazoned upon the upper part of her dress. And as she stood for a second in the aureole of light there was no mistaking her. It was Dorothy West. Dorothy, and in such surroundings as these! Was he dreaming? Had his wound brought him into a state of hallucination? And then her voice fell upon his ear, and she came towards him.

"Captain Hepburn," said she, "you must lie still till the doctor comes."

He had sat up at her approach, but he obeyed the soft touch of her hands and laid down upon the pile of blankets again. Then she covered him up.

"What in heaven's name brought you here, Dorothy?" he asked, conscious that this was no dream or hallucination. "This is a bit too rough for a girl brought up as you've been brought up."

"I love the work," said she quietly, sitting down upon the edge of the stretcher by his feet. "I got my certificate in London after you left. Then father got a job in this country, and I came with him. I worried the poor old dear so much that for peace's sake he eventually got me an appointment in the Red Cross. Then I came up country with Captain Hill and we got cut off. But for you we should have gone under, I suppose. We have a lot to thank you for."

Michael lay and watched her as she talked. Old dreams came back to him. He remembered the happy days when he had been loved by this pretty girl who sat so close to him. He saw himself again making love to her in the dear old woods by the river, dreamed for a moment the happy dream of the might-have-been. And then rose the barrier of the letter between them, strong as the steel bars of a prison cell.

"I am glad I have been of service to you all," he said a little coldly.

Dorothy noticed the coldness in the tone. Then she remembered what the hon. Bertie Charters had

whispered in her ear: "There is another woman in the case." Tears threatened to come into her pretty eyes, but with a great effort she kept them back.

"Now lie still and do not talk," said she, and kept her eyes turned away.

And so the doctor came presently, and wondered at their silence. Then, with the deft fingers of his craft, he washed and dressed Michael's wound.

"Now turn down and sleep," said he when he had finished, "and in the morning you'll be yourself again."

. . . . . .

The small party sat out under the moon, and enjoyed the freshness of the night. It was good to be able to lie out in the open again after weeks of confinement in dirty trenches and stuffy huts.

Dorothy West lay back in a camp chair, and breathed in the fresh night wind that blew across the raised plateau where they sat. Michael Hepburn, his arm bandaged, sat upon a camp stool and smoked his pipe. Bobbie Hill and the hon. Bertie Charters lay full length on the sand and smoked too.

Down below them, in the light of wood-crackling fires, could be seen small parties of men lying grouped together on the sand—the khaki-clad figures of the relieved British garrison, and the white tunicked figures of the White Horse. That the fraternisation was successful was proved by the shouts of laughter and the merriment that came up to them. A banjo tinkled out pleasantly upon

the night air. A trooper commenced to sing, and silence fell below. He sang his fill, and although the words were so much Greek to most of his khaki listeners they encored him again and again. Then the sounds of a concertina broke out from another quarter, and British voices broke out into "Good-bye, Dolly, I must leave you." And when the singing ceased, and only laughter and chatter floated up to the small party upon the plateau, Bobbie Hill said:

"By the sound of it my boys will be sorry when your men have orders to ride back."

"Yes, you have made them very comfortable, Bobbie," said Michael. "But they can't stop here for ever and a day. Now that you've received news that the relief is within three days' march I'm afraid there is no reason to keep them. I have given orders for their march at daybreak to-morrow. Ah, here's Mian Gul, who has been conveying my orders."

A figure came out of the darkness and threw himself down on the sand by the reclining figure of the hon. Bertie Charters.

"I have made all arrangements, captain sahib," said he. "The White Horse will ride at dawn."

"It is a shame," cried Dorothy from the deck chair. "You must really allow them to stay. My father, the General, will be terribly disappointed if he cannot thank them personally for their splendid work."

"The General will have to ride to Umbarra if he wishes to thank them in person," said Michael. "I'm afraid there are good reasons why they should ride at dawn. I am sorry, but it is irrevocable."

For a moment there was silence, then the hon. Bertie Charters said:

"Well, anyway, the General will have some nice things to say to you, Michael, old boy."

"I'm afraid I shall have to confer another disappointment upon him," said Michael quietly, "for I too ride back to Umbarra in the morning."

"You? Good God, man, it's suicide!" said the hon. Bertie, rising from his reclining position and gazing inquiringly towards Michael. "You're an outcast now. You've betrayed these fellows, and they'll make short work of you if you so much as show your nose there."

"It is madness, Michael," said Dorothy, leaning forward appealingly in the dim light. "Why should you ride back to Umbarra?"

"I have good reasons for my actions, nurse," said Michael. "Again I am sorry. This also is irrevocable."

He rose to his feet.

"I must go and see how Harry is managing with my traps," said he, and, turning, he walked away into the darkness.

"There goes a very brave man," said Mian Gul softly as they watched him go. "He rides back to Umbarra because a lady will suffer if he stays away. To-morrow he rides knowingly to his death so that a lady who loves him may go free. It is such deeds as these that have made you Englishmen so truly great. Allah preserve him and bring him safely through this danger."

Mian's voice cracked audibly towards the finish, and a silence fell upon the small party. As for

Dorothy, she felt that her heart would break. The tears fell freely down her pretty cheeks, and she was thankful for the darkness that hid her agitation from the others.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

THE MAN IS A TRAITOR; LET HIM DIE

"Oh, ye fools of little understanding, cannot you see that if a hair of this man's head is harmed you seal your country's fate? Will ye not listen to the words of your holy men who speak through the mouth of Allah? Do they lie, these men who give their lives to the Almighty? The holy one of Parrapat prophesied years ago that I, a humble servant, should rise to be one of the first counsellors to a great chief. His words proved true, for were they not the words of Allah? He prophesied also that this Englishman should save Umbarra. Shall they not also prove true? Ye are blind, with eyes of understanding that cannot see, else to-day, when the captain sahib rode in and gave himself up, you would have fallen down and worshipped him. For I tell you that as surely as night follows day you will rejoice at the thing that he has done. He has saved Umbarra, and for a reward you have thrown him into prison. There he will die, for he has been stricken down with fever, and there is none by to attend him. I tell ye again, beware what you do."

Hindoo Khan looked down the long table where the councillors of Umbarra were seated towards the dais. His Highness Nana Dun sat listening with a sullen look upon his face. The expedition that had ridden forth to bring great glory upon Umbarra had failed through the Englishman's treachery. The White Horse, the pride of his heart, had sided against him. The troopers had ridden back, and

scattered one by one to their homes. The infantry, under Subahdar Pandy, were still encamped on the shores of the Samuni awaiting orders. His campaign had failed, and he felt anger in his heart. Suddenly he raised himself, and brought his fist down upon the table with great force.

"The man is a traitor," said he. "Let him die."

A murmur of assent came from those gathered round the table. Some echoed the words, "Let him die," others urged that he be led out and shot.

Hindoo Khan stood looking down upon them with a great sorrow written upon his face.

"What good can this man's death bring you? The sweetness of revenge will be of short duration. When the Englishman dies the British will sweep down upon Umbarra and your town will blaze to heaven."

A man rose from among the councillors. It was Ezra Singh, Subahdar Pandy's secretary.

"Your Highness," said he, pointing towards Hindoo Khan, "that man should also be punished. It was he who helped to spoil our plans. Ever since the day he urged us not to side with the Wadiris he has been against us—has planned against us. I cannot understand why he too goes free."

Again a murmur of assent from those gathered round the table. Hindoo looked down upon them with a smile.

"I am an old man," said he quietly. "My days are already numbered. What matter it to me if they be made shorter by a few years? I am ready if your Highness has no longer faith in an old servant who has served him faithfully for many years."

Nana Dun sat for some time lost in thought, while a great stillness fell upon the room. He loved Hindoo, but his anger at the failure of his plans burnt strong within him. He had dreamed great dreams—dreams of glories to follow a successful feat of arms—and these dreams had been shattered by a traitor of an Englishman and the old man who now stood before him pleading for the traitor's life.

"Why not?" said he presently. "Let him be thrown into prison with the other."

One of the councillors rose from the table, and, throwing open one of the great doors, called to someone outside. There was the tramp of feet outside, and three grey-clad figures carrying rifles with fixed bayonets entered. They halted by the door, awaiting orders.

"Your Highness," said Hindoo, "before you have me marched away I make one request of you. My faithful service surely deserves one favour from your hands."

"Speak, and your request shall be granted," said Nana Dun irritably.

"Throw open the doors that lead out upon the balcony," said Hindoo, pointing to two large doors of ebony that stood at the farther end of the room.

"What fool's request is this?" growled Nana Dun.

"The last favour of an old man who has served you well."

"Have your way then," said Nana Dun, and he gave the order to the waiting soldiers.

With a rattling of bolts and chains the doors were thrown open, and the moonlight streamed in.

For a moment there fell a great silence upon the company, each man wondering what this strange request might mean. It was broken eventually by Nana Dun.

"And now," said His Highness, "you can take this man away and place him with the Englishman."

"One moment," said Hindoo, raising his hand, "Listen. A message is coming from out of the night."

Again there was silence in the room, the only sound from without a night-jar calling to its mate. Then suddenly a voice, shrill and piercing, came up to them.

"I am the holy man of Parrapat. I would speak to the great one, Nana Dun."

And, when they all sat silent within, again the voice cried.

"I bid thee, in the name of Allah, come forth."

"Go," said Hindoo, "lest the wrath of Allah descend upon thee. Go."

Nana Dun rose unsteadily to his feet. His knees trembled under him. Descending from the dais, he stepped out upon the balcony. In the courtyard below, lit up by the flares of many torches, stood a ragged figure. He was naked save for a loin-cloth of dirty rags. His flesh, wasted upon him by years of long abstinence, was not sufficient to hide the bones beneath. It looked as though a skeleton stood down there in the aureole of light cast by the flaring torches. Behind him, standing respectfully at a distance, could be seen a sea of dark faces with eyes turned upwards to the balcony.

"What is it you want?" cried Nana Dun in a voice of fear.

"I come to save your soul from sin," said the

holy man, raising two bony arms heavenwards. "Release the Englishman."

A roar rose up out of the shadows behind: "Release the Englishman."

"And your reasons?" said Nana Dun with parched lips.

"Release the Englishman, who has saved Umbarra from the sword. The words of Allah, issuing out of the mouths of his holy men, are true words. As he has spoken, so has it happened. He has saved Umbarra from annihilation. Her rulers, against the wishes of the people, made war upon the British. This Englishman frustrated them. He rode to the help of the garrison cut off at the foot of the hills and saved them. By this act he has turned the sword of the British upon our side. It is well, for had it been otherwise our homes by now would be blazing and our sons put to the sword. Even so has it happened to the Wadiris. The British in their thousands have ridden down into their country and their homes are blazing. The Englishman, with a wisdom greater than yours, has saved you from a power that would have swamped you as the Ganges the fields that border it. Release the Englishman, lest the harm that he has saved you from be visited upon you."

Again the mighty roar from the dark crowd in the shadows: "Release the Englishman."

Nana Dun looked down upon the sea of faces, and listened to the voices that shrieked to him out of the night with fear in his heart. It seemed to him that his power was gone, that his rulership had received its last blow. Suddenly a voice sounded in his ear close by. It was Hindoo speaking to him.

"Grant their request, your Highness," said he, "and your power will be greater than before. An old man with the wisdom of many years counsels you. I prophesy that no harm shall come to you, but a greatness that you never knew before. I know the people. Their hearts are filled with joy that they have been saved from a cruel war. Give way to them, and they will bless you; oppose them and it will be the end."

A great hope came to Nana Dun as he heard the words. Hindoo Khan had many a time proved right; might not his words again come true? He raised his hand, and a great silence fell in the courtyard below.

"The Englishman shall be released," he called down, "and every care shall be taken of him. I too greet him as the saviour of Umbarra."

A mighty shriek of joy rolled up from below—a deafening volley of sound—and Nana Dun felt joy in his heart when he realised that they were cheering him for the thing that he had done.

. . . . . .

In a room of marble, with alabaster pillars, upon a wooden bed with snow-white sheets, lay Michael Hepburn, tossing in the delirium of fever. By his side, silhouetted in the light of torches blazing in niches upon the marble walls, knelt Jahannarra.

"Speak to me, O my beloved," she cried, covering his face with kisses. "They have sent you to me so that I shall save you from the fever. Speak to me, O beloved. I will give my life that yours may be saved."

But the man tossing upon the bed was unconscious of her presence.

"Dorothy," he cried presently, "your love will make a man of me. The arbour—our dear old arbour—do you remember our first kiss—frightened the robins who came to feed out of our hands. The letter—why did you write the letter? My heart is broken."

CHAPTER FORTY

AN EMBARRASSING INTERVIEW

Dorothy West after her trying experience at Settra was given leave of absence, and came down to Bombay to stay with the aunt of Bobbie Hill. Mrs. Van de West, whose husband was in the Indian Civil Service, was a jolly little lady of close on forty years. She was full of fun and ready for any frolic or enjoyment going. Her husband's position gave her the entrée to the best society, and invitations to dances and race-meetings and polo-matches were more than could be coped with in the weekly programme. Dorothy was rushed here and there. Any girl free from heartache would have been in the seventh heaven of delight. But Dorothy had seen Michael again, and, though the meeting had seemed to estrange them more than ever, she knew that he was the only man she would ever care for. The loss of him left her broken in spirit. The gay little Mrs. Van de West tried her best to make her happy, but she met with failure. The hon. Bertie Charters, staying at the Grand Hotel, hovered around. He made it his duty to be at every function that she attended. He had told himself that Dorothy now would be an easy conquest. Michael attached to another lady was the great stumbling-block that had been rolled away. And so he pressed his suit again, and, being put off, wondered and grumbled more and more at the perversity of women. Dorothy suffered his attentions for a long time, fearing to

lose a friend. Then one day when cornered she told him the truth.

" I shall never love anyone else, Bertie. It would not be fair to marry you under those conditions. In fact, I could not bring myself to do it. You must go out of my life, and try to forget. I am awfully sorry if I hurt you. You are an old and dear friend. I shall grieve to lose you."

And then the good stuff that was in the hon. Bertie came out and showed itself.

" You shall never lose my friendship, Dorothy," said he. " If you call me from the uttermost parts of the earth I will come to you. I will go away now, and worry you no more. But remember I am, and shall always be, your very dear friend."

And, taking a small hand in his, he kissed it tenderly, and went away.

One day when Dorothy, glad to be free and alone for a few minutes, was sitting by the open window that looked down from Malabar Hill upon the fairy city set in its gardens of gorgeous flowers, a visitor was announced. The name given was unknown to her. But when a heavily veiled figure entered, dressed in the bright colours of the East, she rose with trembling limbs. Instinct told her that she was face to face with Michael's lady.

" Jahannarra," she muttered, catching at the table nearby for support. " Jahannarra——" and further words failed her.

For a moment her visitor stood motionless by the doorway, and then suddenly cast aside her veil. Dorothy was conscious of a pair of flashing blue eyes regarding her curiously. One glance at the smiling face before her told her that Jahannarra was

very beautiful, and she felt a great jealousy surge up within her for the woman who had taken Michael away from her.

"The mem-sahib knows my name," said Jahannarra presently. "I did not expect that."

"I have heard of you from a great friend of mine who went to Umbarra," said Dorothy. "But please take a seat. I see you have come to talk with me."

"Yes," said Jahannarra, sitting down upon a settee by the open window. "I came to see you for my own reasons. I have just left the Captain Michael Sahib. You were once his friend, were you not?"

"Yes, once I was his friend," said Dorothy in a low voice, and she glanced away across the town to where the blue bay, with its shipping and sombre batteries, lay. "What has this woman come to see me for?" was her thought.

"The captain sahib has been ill—very ill," said Jahannarra. "I have nursed him, and now he is convalescent. In his delirium he mentioned your name many times. I came to see the mem-sahib who has caused him this great unhappiness. Like all women, I am curious you see."

"I do not understand you, Jahannarra," said Dorothy, controlling herself with an effort. "You speak of causing the captain sahib unhappiness. I have never done that."

"A woman always blames the man," said Jahannarra. "It is the same the world over. But the captain sahib shall be unhappy no longer. I shall give my whole life to make him smile again, and I feel I shall succeed. When he is better we go away to a bungalow in the mountains—a beautiful

bungalow given to me by my uncle, Hindoo Khan. Those will be glorious days for us, and I shall soon bring the sunshine into the captain sahib's life again."

"You did not come to tell me this," said Dorothy. "Tell me, why did you come?"

"To ask a question," said Jahannarra. "Why do you no longer love the captain sahib?"

"You foolish girl," cried Dorothy, the tears mounting to her eyes. "I have never ceased to love him, and I shall love him to the end of my life."

"You still love him?" said Jahannarra, a look of surprise upon her pretty face. "But I do not understand. If you still love him, then why did you give him up?"

"I give him up? It was he who gave me up, Jahannarra."

For a moment Jehan sat looking at Dorothy with wide-open eyes.

"The captain sahib is not that sort of man," said she presently.

"There must have been something. Please tell me the truth. If I knew it would make my task of making the man I love happy. Will not the mem-sahib help me?"

And when Dorothy was silent:

"Perhaps the mem-sahib wrote a letter?"

"I have not written to him since he was in India for the first time."

"Not a little letter in which the mem-sahib said that the troth between them must come to an end?"

"No, never that, Jahannarra. Would you write such a thing to the man you loved?"

"Then the mem-sahib never wrote a letter such as that?"

"Of course not, Jahannarra. With a woman's curiosity you have come here to-day to find why our love-affair was ended. Go back to the man you love—he alone can tell you. I shall think of you often. For my sake make him happy——"

And, unable to control herself longer, Dorothy threw her arms upon the table, and, hiding her face, burst into tears.

Jahannarra rose to her feet, and her hand upon the table trembled visibly.

"I am sorry," she said in a low voice. "I ought not to have come—I ought not to have come."

She moved towards the door, and, opening it, looked back. Dorothy was still weeping convulsively by the window. For a moment Jahannarra stood watching her, a look of great pity upon her face. Then she made a movement as though she would go back and comfort the weeping girl, stood irresolute for a moment, and then went out by the open door.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

TO SOME LOVE COMETH ONLY ONCE

JAHANNARRA ceased singing, but her fingers still played *sotto voce* upon the strings of the banjo the music of the air she had been singing. She glanced across at Michael sitting propped against the pillows she had placed for him upon the divan. He was deep in thought, and gazed down in the compound below with a look of sorrow upon his face. Jahannarra ceased playing, and, going to him, knelt by his side.

" Why are you sad, O my beloved? " she cried, taking one of his hands in hers. " Was it my song? It was unkind of me. I am not a good nurse to choose so melancholy a subject, eh? "

Michael turned to her with a smile upon his face.

" Do not say that, little Jehan," said he. " You are the best nurse in the world. But for you I should not have pulled through. I have to thank you for many weary nights of watching by my side. Hindoo has told me all. You sacrificed rest and pleasure that you might be in attendance when I was unconscious. I owe you my life."

" I but saved your life that I might be the sharer of it," said Jahannarra.

" Yes," said Michael, and his eyes once more sought the field of dazzling creepers that grew in the compound below.

Thankful for all Jehan's kindness, he was thinking of the night when, in a weak moment, he had asked her to be his wife. Ever since he had regretted it.

"Still sad, my Michael?" Two arms nestled round his neck, and his face was turned gently to hers.

"I want to ask you a question, beloved. The Englishman loves truly only once. He is not like we of the East, to whom it is given to love many times. Is it not so, my Michael?"

"What a strange question, my little Jehan," said Michael with a laugh. "Some Englishmen love a good many times by the number of divorce cases you see in the papers."

"Ah, but those sort—they are those who have not met with love. Tell me, there are men among your countrymen to whom love cometh only once? This has been told to me; is it not the truth?"

"My little Jehan is full of questions this afternoon. Let us change the subject. What has this to do with you and me. Come, sing me another song."

"But I want to know, my Michael. I shall not sing again to thee till I have had my answer."

"If you insist, little Jehan, then I must tell you what I think. There are some men—shall we call them very sincere men?—who, though they marry, never really recover from their first love—the love for the woman who turned them down."

He spoke very quietly, and his eyes were turned away. Jehan watched him in silence, and her eyes moistened with tears. "I pray that he may be wrong," was her thought. "I must teach him to forget."

"Forgive your Jehan," said she, going back to her seat and picking up the banjo. "I was curious as to this thing that I had heard. I wanted your opinion. Thou hast earned thy song, beloved."

And her fingers strayed across the strings of the banjo, and the air was filled with her rich, melodious voice.

. . . . . .

Half an hour later Hindoo Khan came out upon the balcony, and when Jahannarra jumped up to greet him he kissed her gently upon the forehead.

"Thou must run away, little Jehan," said he tenderly. "I have something that I wish to say to the captain sahib alone."

"And am not I, who will one day be his wife, to share his secrets?" said Jehan with a pout.

"If the captain sahib think it best he will tell thee, Jehan. But I speak to him alone or not at all."

"I know the captain sahib will tell me all, so I go in peace," said Jehan, and she left them.

For a few minutes Hindoo sat looking fixedly at Michael. He seemed to find words difficult to frame. Presently he said:

"Dost thou remember Sekhandar Dhun?"

"Sekhandar Dhun?" echoed Michael, and he tried to remember where he had heard that name before. It seemed familiar somehow.

"No, Hindoo," said he presently. "I have probably met the man. But one meets so many people, and the memory is apt to play one tricks. Who is this Sekhandar Dhun, and what in heaven's name has he got to do with your visit?"

"Cast back your memory, my son, to the night when you bivouacked in the fortress of Bilasparg."

Michael sat up upon his pillows, all interest now. An ugly black face rose up before him. It was the face of the man Sekhandar Dhun, who for three

weeks had served amongst his retinue of servants—a man he had beaten many times for theft.

"I know the man. Well, what of him, Hindoo?"

"That night when orders came for you to join the main body you were drugged."

"Drugged? Good God!" said Michael, and he sat upright upon the divan.

"Yes—by this man, Sekhandar Dhun."

So that was it. Many things that had puzzled Michael were now explained. If only this information had come to light at the court-martial, he would have been acquitted. But what did that matter now? He had cast away all thought of ever going back to England. Three weeks hence he would ride with Jehan to Guttrum, to live there the remaining days of his life. Yes, there was no going back, but he felt relieved at the information; it cleared him of all stigma for that breach of duty.

"So that was it, Hindoo," he said presently. "That's very interesting. I'm glad that I am cleared. But, by-the-bye, how did you come to learn all this?"

"It was by my orders that you were drugged."

"By your orders?" Michael lay as one dazed.

"I do not understand, Hindoo," said he, after many minutes of dead silence. "Please explain. Why should you wish to ruin me. And why should you now tell me of this thing?"

"Two questions," said Hindoo. "They shall have their answer in turn. Listen. Many years ago, when I served the dear General Sahib your father, and you were my dear little *bawa* sahib that I loved and still love as a son—I visited the hermitage of one who was known as the Holy Man of Parrapat.

He made a prophecy—that I, who was but a poor servant to a sahib, should one day become the counsellor of a king. His words came to pass. He also prophesied that trouble should come upon my people. Then he pointed to my little *bawa* sahib playing innocently amongst the banyans with his toys and said: 'When that trouble comes you must bring that *bawa* sahib to your side. He will be your country's saviour.' That is why when trouble threatened I brought thee to Umbarra. By a cruel trick, yes. But it was the only way. You would not come while serving with distinction in the Indian Army. For the second time the holy one's words proved true. My little *bawa* sahib brought me back to power, and saved Umbarra from the sword. That is the answer to thy first question, my son. Now for your second. Last night the holy man came to me and said that you must leave Umbarra. He said that the thing you contemplated doing was not good in the sight of Allah; it was not well that you should marry my little Jehan. He says you must go."

"I have given my word, Hindoo. Nothing will make me alter it."

"Listen, and be patient for awhile, my son. While you were heavy with the fever I made a journey. I went down into the plains and visited your great War Lord. I told him everything, and he promised me reparation should be made. They are overjoyed at your doings at Settra, my son. Great things will come of it. Thou wilt be received with a reception of a king. Great honours will be conferred upon you; your career of a soldier will once more be open to you. You will not give up

all this, and live a life of a hermit amongst the hills at Guttrum."

"I shall give up all, Hindoo. My word is given to Jehan."

"One little word, and for that years of misery."

"Years of misery if I broke it, Hindoo."

"I love thee for it, my son," said Hindoo, rising to his feet. "The word of an Englishman is his bond. It is thus that your race has proved itself the greatest nation in the world. I will not press thee. Allah must unravel this riddle—I leave it to his better understanding. I leave you now. Remember, whatever cometh I shall always love thee as my son."

And with a troubled look upon his old lined face he turned and went sadly away.

And Michael, leaning back upon the pillows, gazed with bitter thoughts into the twilight that was settling upon the world outside. The dream of his life was gone. He had bartered his career. He had estranged himself from his own beloved country, because of a promise he had made when his heart was filled with gratitude.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

THE WANDERER'S RETURN

CINDERELLA had been very ill. She lay upon the small bed her face looking drawn and white in the light of the two candles that flickered in the draught from the window. At present she slept. Her aunt, Margery Manners, sat at the table near the window writing rapidly upon a sheet of foolscap. An article was due that very night, and she must finish it at all costs. An article meant money, and money was very necessary just now, so she wrote at top speed, for presently Dulcie would awake and her attentions would be required by the bedside. Sheet after sheet was filled with neatly written paragraphs, and still the child slept upon the bed. Presently Margery Manners ceased writing.

"Thank goodness that is finished," she said with a sigh of relief. Then she began to collect the scattered sheets and place them in order. Suddenly a faint little voice called from the bed.

"Auntie—auntie. Please come here."

She rose quickly to her feet, and, going to the bedside, softly stroked back the straggling golden locks.

"What is it, dear?" she asked.

"I've had such a lovely dream, auntie dear. I dreamt the prince—my prince—had come back."

"You must try and forget the prince, Dulcie. You will never see him again, dear. He was a fraud."

"Yes, I know, auntie. He did not keep his

promises, and a prince who does not keep promises is a fraud. But it was a lovely dream, auntie."

"Yes, I know, Dulcie, but I think it would be best if you forgot about the prince altogether. It only worries you, dear."

"Very well, auntie. I won't speak about him again."

"That's good. Now I've got to run out to the post. I'll bring you back a book."

Margery Manners went back to the table, and continued collecting the pages of her article.

For a few minutes there was silence. Then suddenly from the bed:

"Do you believe in dreams, auntie?"

"No, dear," said Marjorie Manners, absorbed in her task.

"I've read in papers that sometimes they come true."

"Oh," from the table, and the scratch, scratch of a pen.

"I once dreamt that my black cat which is dead was going to have kittens. It had two. Only they was drowned."

"Were drowned, dear."

"Were drowned."

Again silence, only broken by the rustling of paper and the scratching of a pen.

Presently from the bed:

"It would be lovely, wouldn't it, if dreams came true?"

"Yes."

"I once dreamt that I had a purse that was never empty. Wouldn't that be nice? Think of the sweets one could buy, and cakes like the cakes we

had when the prince who was a fraud came to tea, and the theatres we could go to like we did once—and—if only dreams came true—and my prince came back."

The little golden head lay back silent upon the pillows with closed eyes. Margery Manners, having sealed the envelope and addressed it, came across to the bedside, she stood looking down for a moment at the little white face upon the pillow, then, sighing, she turned and walked across to the door. But it was opened before she reached it, and a man stood confronting her with a smile upon his sunburnt face.

"You!" she cried, starting back. "I—I did not expect ever to see you again."

"May I come in?" said the hon. Bertie Charters. "I hear you have had trouble. Little Cinderella has been ill."

"Yes." She pointed to the bed. "Yes, she has been very ill, but I think she will get better now."

"Poor little Cinderella!"

He walked to the bedside, and looked down upon the sleeping child.

"You have had a doctor, of course?"

"Yes. He has been unable to do much."

"Why?"

"He says she is fretting, and that only time will cure her."

"Oh."

The hon. Bertie Charters sat down by the bedside.

"You don't mind if I sit down, Miss Manners? I've got something to get off my mind."

"I shall be delighted. Forgive an untidy room, though."

"I suppose you've wondered why I went off like that without an explanation?"

"Dulcie has. She calls you the prince who is a fraud."

"And you—you have not given it a thought?"

"Well, I did of course think you would write and explain."

"Ah, I'm glad of that. You see, I have been building dreams lately. Time has made me look on things in a different light."

Margery Manners' pretty face filled with blushes, and she walked to the table and became suddenly very busy collecting the scattered sheets of manuscript that lay there.

"You talk in riddles," said she. "As you used to do in the good—before you went away."

"Good old times," said the hon. Bertie with emphasis. "Yes, they were—for me anyway. I have thought of them often. I was very happy then. I was a fool to give them up. I bartered true happiness to chase a phantom across the seas."

"A phantom? More riddles."

And then the hon. Bertie Charters told her the story of his journey to India, and of the things that befell him there.

"And in the long days upon the ship coming home, when I had time to think things over, it suddenly came to me that it was a phantom love I had been chasing, I realised that I had never been really in love with Dorothy. I had made a mistake. I was so deucedly happy after she gave me my dismissal, I argued. Fancy a man who has been turned down singing in his bath, and eating seven courses for dinner. Fancy him enjoying the open deck, and

the sun, and the blue sea when he ought to be leading the life of an ascetic pining in the solitude of his own cabin. Wouldn't you think such a man unnatural, Margery?"

"I should think him sensible."

"Good heavens! I tell you it's not natural. I felt it wasn't, and so I looked round for the cause. And I came to the conclusion it was the photo."

"The photo."

"Yes, the dear little piece of cardboard I've carried round with me for close on two months. I used to take it out and look at it when the other lady in the story had treated me badly. It consoled me no end. That wasn't right either, was it? If I had been truly in love it wouldn't have made a hang of difference, would it?"

"I think you are talking enigmas."

"It's my bringing up. I never make myself clear. Perhaps that's why I've never married. I'm rather glad now, though."

He ceased speaking. A silence fell between them, only broken by the rustling of papers from the table. Margery Manners had turned her back to hide the blushes upon her pretty face. But there was the light of great happiness in the eyes she hid from the hon. Bertie.

"Just a little piece of cardboard—but it's pulled me through some devilish nasty places," said the hon. Bertie, taking a photo from his pocket. "Of course I ought not to have kept it, but it was a present from my little Cinderella."

He rose to his feet and walked across to the table.

"I return it now, Margery, and ask your

forgiveness. It was awful cheek keeping the photo, wasn't it?"

Margery Manners took the photo held out to her.

"My photo!" she cried, but there was no surprise in her voice. With a woman's intuition she had guessed. "How dare you! I think it was very naughty of Dulcie to give it to you."

"It was the kindest thing she could do. I shall bless little Cinderella for the rest of my life."

A cry from the bed made them both turn. Cinderella was sitting bolt upright in the bed, with wide-open eyes.

"My prince!" she cried. "The dream has come true. My prince has returned."

"Yes," said the hon. Bertie, going to the bedside, "your Prince has come back."

Two little arms were thrown about his neck.

"And you're not a fraud?"

"Of course not."

"And you won't leave us again."

"Never."

"Oh, how glorious! You don't know how I've missed you, prince."

"And I you, little Cinderella. One day I want you to come and live in my palace."

"In your palace? How heavenly!"

"Yes, when Auntie Marge promises to marry me."

"You take too much for granted, sir."

"Oh, but you will, auntie. It's the one thing I've longed for."

And when there was silence from Margery Manners:

"Auntie, come here, dear."

When the blushing Margery was seated by her

side, Cinderella disengaged one of the arms from the hon. Bertie Charters' shoulder and placed it round her aunt's neck.

"You are the two people I love best in the world, and you've just got to marry, so there."

"That settles it, Margery," said the hon. Bertie with a laugh.

"I suppose it does," said Margery very faintly.

"Oh, you darling two! We shall now live together happily ever after," cried Cinderella. "And now give each other a huge, whacking kiss."

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

ON SMALL THINGS SOMETIMES GREAT DEPEND

MICHAEL took the papers and placed them back in the large envelope franked with the black O.H.M.S. One was a copy of the *Gazette* in which he had been listed for the V.C., the other a letter from the War Office offering him reinstatement in Her Majesty's Army as a Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel. The heavily sealed envelope had been handed him but a few minutes ago, and when he opened it and learnt of the honours that had been conferred, strange to say he felt no awakening enthusiasm in his heart.

If only they had been his a few months earlier they might have meant a good deal then. Perhaps Dorothy would not—ah! but that was all ended now. In three days' time he rode out to Guttrum with Jahannarra. There his new life would begin.

And while he sat deep in thought at the small table set before the windows, the bead curtains behind him were silently moved aside and the face of Jehan peeped in. For a moment she looked towards the window where Michael sat, and then very quietly she stepped into the room. In her hand she carried a silver photo-frame, and, stealing across the floor on tiptoe, she set it upon the piano that stood at the farther end of the room. But first she glanced furtively at the table to see that she was not observed. That done, she crept back, on tiptoe still, and, coming behind the chair where Michael sat, threw two arms about his neck and rested a cheek upon his shoulder.

"Why art thou sad, beloved?" she asked. "Thou hast scarce given me one smile to-day. And you creep away from your little Jehan as though you desired to avoid her. Three hours have I been left alone. I am very angry with you, Michael Sahib."

Michael turned and kissed the pretty cheek that nestled close to his.

"Forgive me, pretty one," said he. "But I had many things to attend to. And if I appear sad it is because I find it difficult breaking with the old life. But in three days' time that will be all altered. You'll find me as happy as a schoolboy then."

"It will be paradise," cried Jehan rapturously. "Oh, how I long for those three days to pass. And we shall be married by a *mullah*—I have arranged it all—and live, like they do in your English story-books, happily ever after."

And when Michael was silent:

"And there will be no worries there in the palace at Guttrum—money will be plentiful; Hindoo has promised that—and thou wilt no longer have to work, but can end your days with rest. And we will ride together in the day in country that is the most beautiful in the world, and at night I will sing to you as I did in the old days, and one of these days thou wilt take me to visit the land of your fathers——"

She ceased speaking. Some look in Michael's face struck her.

"But thou art not pleased, beloved. Are you not happy at the thought of riding away with me?"

"Yes, yes, little Jehan," said Michael, with a laugh that was forced. "Forgive me, but I am

thoughtful to-day. We shall be very happy, I am sure. And as for me, I shall be as right as rain presently."

"I prefer you in the state you call happy as a schoolboy," said Jahannarra with a little pout. "And I shall go away and not return until you have got over your sulks."

And turning, she walked away, in spite of the entreaties to come back that were called after her. Holding the bead curtains aside with one hand she looked back at Michael.

"Thou art best left until the sulky fit has passed," said she; and, stepping outside into the passage, let the curtains fall back into place. She went no farther, but, crouching in the shadows, slightly parted the curtains and kept her eyes fixed on the figure in the chair.

For many minutes Michael sat immovable where she had left him. Then he rose to his feet and began to pace up and down the room. Backwards and forwards he went with knitted brows, and eyes cast down upon the floor—backwards and forwards, seemingly unconscious of his surroundings.

Every time he passed the piano Jehan's heart gave a bound. Would he notice the large silver frame that stood there for all the world to see? But he passed it again and again with unseeing eyes. The minutes grew into hours, and still Michael paced up and down, and still Jehan watched with cramped limbs from the shadows. Then suddenly the thing happened. Michael saw the photo, and stood stock still before it. For a long time he remained motionless, gazing at the pretty face that seemed to be regarding him from within the frame.

"Confound the fellow! I told him to put it away," he said presently, and stepping forward took it tenderly in his hands. For a moment or two he stood regarding it. Then suddenly he raised it and pressed his lips upon the glass.

"It is impossible, Dorothy," he muttered. "I have tried and failed. I shall never forget——"

But the watcher behind the curtains heard no more. Jahannarra had sunk down upon the floor, and was sobbing as though her heart would break.

. . . . . .

For two days Jehan disappeared, and no one knew where she had gone. But on the third day—the day arranged to ride out to Guttrum—Michael was awakened by the rattling of stones upon the windows of his room. Rising, he looked out to see her waiting for him in the compound below. She sat upright upon her large white mare, and called cheekily up to him: "Thou sleepest like a laggard, captain sahib. For shame! And it is your wedding morning."

Half an hour later they rode forth together, with Harry Hawkins bringing up the rear. The batman's face was a study in sulks. He did not like this expedition, and he did not mean to hide his dislike apparently. Michael questioned Jehan about her absence, but she would not divulge her secret.

"Thou wilt learn presently, my beloved," she said. "Thou must have a little patience."

And so they came presently to the great gates of Umbarra, and, riding through the slumbering streets, arrived at the palace. Here His Royal Highness Nana Dun and Hindoo Khan, mounted upon large

white horses, were waiting. They were to ride with them a small distance upon the way.

Nana Dun was graciousness itself. He pointed with pride to the medals—honours conferred upon him by the British Government—which he wore upon his breast, talked of an exchequer enriched by many thousands of rupees—a gift from the same quarter—and thanked Michael again for saving him from a folly that would have meant the ruin of Umbarra.

Five miles from the palace, with many wishes for good luck, they said good-bye, and Michael and Jehan continued their way along the rough path that led to Guttrum and the mountains.

Jehan babbled away incessantly, and Michael was glad to listen. He rode in silence, for his heart was heavy within him. To-day he severed himself from the old life and rode into captivity.

The path they followed led gradually upwards. Soon they left the ferns and tall grasses behind, and rode out into more rugged country—a country of rock and hills covered with fir and pine. In the far distance the mountains covered with perpetual snow lay hidden in fog clouds aping their shapes.

When the sun was at its height they sought protection in a forest of pine, and the faithful Harry prepared the food they had brought in the saddle-bags.

Jahannarra, seated upon a rug that Michael had spread for her, suddenly became very quiet, and, thinking that perhaps she was offended by his silence, he tried his hardest to presume good spirits.

"Little Jehan," said he, raising a glass filled with

port, " here's to our future life. We shall both be very happy."

" You mean that ? " cried Jehan, snuggling close. " You really mean that ? "

" Yes, my Jehan," said Michael, but there was no conviction in his voice.

When the sun was sinking they rode forth again and followed the path that led ever upwards ; on and on till the shadows of evening fell upon them, and the moon came up and shed its blue light down upon the world.

Presently they came to the summit of a hill, and paused to look at the view beyond—a grand view of rugged hills bathed in blue, and of a world of white beyond, for the fog-clouds had rolled away. A glorious chain of rugged beauty now lay before them in the far distance, mountain on mountain sparkling like silver in the light of the moon, rising to meet the darker blue of the sky in all sorts of fairy fantastic shapes. And while they stood to drink in the beauty of the view Michael heard the sound of distant singing.

" Listen, Jehan," said he. " What is that ? "

" It comes from the Monastery of Shah Magul," said Jehan. " It is a rest house for the unfortunate women of Umbarra, a shelter where they can end their days in peace. Come, I will show you."

She rode down the hill and Michael followed her. Presently they came to a great building that loomed up suddenly out of the night. An iron gateway lay in front of them, and before it stood a large cypress tree. As they came to the gateway they saw a figure sitting upon a stool behind the bars. It was the figure of a man wearing a snow-white turban

and a ragged, narrow loincloth, and as he sat shivering in the keen night air he mumbled prayers in a sort of Gregorian chant. When they rode up he rose to his feet.

" Who comes to disturb the keeper of the gate? " he cried, and peered forth.

" We are but passing by, holy one," said Jehan. " We do not wish to disturb you."

" Then go in peace, my children," said the holy man, then he sank down upon his seat behind the bars of the gate, and continued to chant with chattering teeth.

When presently they turned away Jehan suddenly stopped beneath the branches of the cypress tree.

" Kiss me, beloved," said she. " One little kiss."

And Michael, struck with the suddenness of the request, did her bidding and rode on, wondering.

Suddenly lights appeared like sparkling star-points among the trees a few hundreds yards away.

" It is the bungalow," cried Jehan.

And Michael knew that they had come to their journey's end.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

THE JOURNEY'S END

WILLING hands helped them from their horses, and they passed through the halo of light by the doorway into a large and lofty hall. A log fire crackled brightly in an open grate. Michael, crossing, warmed his fingers in the blaze, for they were chilled by the night air.

"Jehan," said he presently, turning from the fire, "I——" But she had disappeared.

A Chippendale chair stood by the hearth, and, sitting down, he looked about him. The hall was panelled in oak from ceiling to floor, and the walls were hung with pictures framed in gold. The furniture was Chippendale, and matched the colour of the panelling. It was an English house. Such a house he might have expected, knowing Hindoo Khan and the man's adoration for the customs of his country. Somehow it reminded him of England, and a certain house upon the banks of the Thames. It was a pity that everywhere he went things should arise to remind him of the old country, and the happy might-have-been.

Presently a footstep on the oak boards behind him made him turn. He saw Jehan standing before him.

She still wore her warm riding cloak, and carried a whip in her hand. Some expression in her face made him rise with an exclamation of surprise to his feet.

"What is it, Jehan?" he cried. "There is something the matter?"

Her face wore a look of sadness. The smile had gone out of her eyes.

"Listen, Michael Sahib," said she, and her voice trembled a little. "A long time ago in your own country I made a prophecy. I said that if you came to India happiness would come into your life. Since your coming honours have been conferred upon you, great honours, but they have not brought happiness. No! do not interrupt. I am not blind. You have not been like a man should be who is happy. I have come to know the reason of your sorrow. You love a little English girl. You have tried hard to forget her, but you have failed. Time would never wipe out that love. Perhaps you think it would, but I tell you it is impossible. To-night we were to be married, you and I, but that cannot be. I should never be happy knowing that you loved another. I am too proud to be only a sharer of your love."

And when Michael stood, too dazed by the unexpectancy of it all to speak:

"To-night that which you have sought shall be found. Your life dream awaits you. Go! seek in the room of the fountains."

And turning, she ran out by the open doors into the night.

For a moment Michael stood irresolute, and then he followed, calling "Jehan, Jehan." But when he came out into the compound he saw her riding away along the path that had brought them to the bungalow. He called after her, but she never once looked back, and soon she disappeared into the night mists.

For a long time Michael stood looking to the spot whence she had gone. Then he turned back again into the warmth of the hall.

"Go seek in the room of the fountains," he muttered, and a great hope came into his heart as the truth began to dawn on him.

A doorway at the farther end of the hall caught his eye. He approached it with rapid step and, opening it, passed within. He found himself in a small room brightly lit, and seated at a table with a smile upon his deep-lined face sat General West.

"Well met, Michael," said he. "You little expected to see your old enemy in such a place as this?"

"It is indeed unexpected," stammered Michael, as one in a dream.

"I am a man of few words," said the General. "A few months ago in England you received a letter."

"I did," said Michael, wondering.

"I have a confession to make," continued the General. "And as things in the end have turned out happily I hope you will forgive me. I forged that letter."

Michael stood regarding the old man before him, too surprised to speak.

"Yes, I forged that letter," said the General. "You must forgive an old man. I love my little girl, and her life's happiness is everything to me. When you returned to England after the court-martial a disgraced man I thought that you were an out and out rotter. Since then you have proved that I was wrong. I am glad. I do not regret that

letter. By means of it you have retrieved your life. Fortune and a splendid career await you. If that letter had not been written perhaps, like many men, you might have married, and sunk deeper and deeper into the mire. Things have turned out well. I hope you will forgive me for what I did. I am a soldier, and stoop at nothing to gain my ends. It was a cruel thing to do, perhaps, but it has turned out well in the end. Come, are we still to be enemies?"

He advanced with extended hand, and when Michael took it in his own a smile appeared upon the old, hard face that so seldom smiled.

"I think there is little to forgive," said Michael. "I was weak. I should have given Dorothy up after my disgrace. I was well punished."

"But the punishment has brought its great reward," said the General, and, taking Michael by the arm, he led him to where a bead curtain hung before a doorway, and, pushing them aside, he thrust Michael forward.

"Go in," said he. "Your reward awaits you."

Michael found himself in semi-darkness. A musical tinkling fell upon his ear, and he knew that it was the sound of falling water. Soon his eyes became accustomed to the half-light, and he saw a fountain standing a little distance away. Beneath the fountain a figure stood waiting.

He stepped forward eagerly, with outstretched arms, and the next moment Dorothy was nestling close against his shoulder.

"You have forgiven him, Michael?"

"Of course, darling. He acted for the best. But no one shall part us any more."

And, pressing her to him, he kissed her passionately.

. . . . . .

A great silence lay upon the Monastery of Shah Magul, and the holy man by the gateway sat nodding upon his stool. In the east a dull red glow marked the coming of the sun and another day. Beneath the cypress tree that stood before the gates knelt the figure of a woman. Presently she rose to her feet and walked to the gateway. It was Jehan, her eyes swollen with weeping, and a haggard look upon her pretty face. The holy man heard her coming and rose to his feet.

" Who are you, and what is your wish ? " he cried through the bars of the gate.

" One who seeks the protection of your roof, holy one," said Jehan in a low voice.

A rattling of chains, and the gate was open.

" Pass through, my daughter," said the holy man, " and may you find happiness herein."

And as the gates clanged too a robin sitting upon the top-most branches of the cypress whistled his royal salute to the rising sun.

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